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Title of thesis ..... TEXT, CONTEXT AND PERFORMANCE: .....

..... THE LAY INSTITUTIONS OF GAGAUZ ORTHODOXY .....

..... Degree ..... PHD .....

The Gagauz are a minority living in the southern reaches of the Republic of Moldova. While adhering to the majority religion of Orthodox Christianity, their mother-tongue is a variety of Turkish, a fact that in conjunction with their cultural heritage has shaped their religious identity and transformed their religious practices. The aim of this thesis is to explore Gagauz religion from the perspective of lay religious practice. In doing so I take up the ongoing debate on 'folk' or 'popular' religion and aim to demonstrate how, in the case of the Gagauz, the academic category of 'folk religion' and the field of 'folk' religious practice are instrumental in the construction of Gagauz religious identity. This is explored on two levels. Firstly, on the level of the national political, clerical and academic discourse on the origins, ethno-genesis and religion of the Gagauz, and secondly, on the level of practice, examining how Church perspectives and lay agency operate at the micro-level during actual episodes of religious practice.

The starting point of this research project is the 'texts' of Gagauz religion. Firstly, the way in which the 'texts' on Gagauz religion generated by scholarly, ecclesial and national political discourse instrumentalise religious identities in the construction of Gagauz national identity is discussed. This is followed by an exploration of how the 'primary texts' of Gagauz religious practice used in worship, healing and prayer shape religious consciousness on the ground. Both sets of 'texts' are explored within the wider social, historical and political contexts that underpin and define them. Finally, the role of 'performance' of the 'texts' in the creation, institutionalisation, and transmission of lay religious practice is considered. Each of these dimensions of text, context and performance highlight the role of language in the contested field of practice of 'folk religion' situated between the lay and 'official' institutions of Gagauz Orthodoxy.

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**TEXT, CONTEXT AND PERFORMANCE:  
The Lay Institutions of Gagauz Orthodoxy**

James Alexander Kapalo

Dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment of the  
requirements for the degree of PhD

Department of the Study of Religions  
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September 2008

## Abstract

The Gagauz are a minority living in the southern reaches of the Republic of Moldova. While adhering to the majority religion of Orthodox Christianity, their mother-tongue is a variety of Turkish, a fact that in conjunction with their cultural heritage has shaped their religious identity and transformed their religious practices. The aim of this thesis is to explore Gagauz religion from the perspective of lay religious practice. In doing so I take up the ongoing debate on 'folk' or 'popular' religion and aim to demonstrate how, in the case of the Gagauz, the academic category of 'folk religion' and the field of 'folk' religious practice are instrumental in the construction of Gagauz religious identity. This is explored on two levels. Firstly, on the level of the national political, clerical and academic discourse on the origins, ethno-genesis and religion of the Gagauz, and secondly, on the level of practice, examining how Church perspectives and lay agency operate at the micro-level during actual episodes of religious practice.

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## Acknowledgements

I am enormously grateful to my supervisor, Prof. Paul Gifford, for his patient encouragement, support and advice throughout this project. I also owe an immense debt of gratitude to Dr. Vilmos Tánzos, Dr. Zsuzsanna Erdélyi and the late Andras Kristó, who each in their own way, knowingly or unknowingly, inspired my work in this field.

I would like to offer my thanks to the following individuals and institutions for their help and support during my fieldwork in *Gagauziya*. Firstly, to the late Maria V. Marunievich for the great enthusiasm with which she greeted me and introduced me to *Gagauziya* on my first visit there in 2004. My thanks also go to Dr. Ivanna D. Bankova for her endless patience in teaching me the Gagauz language. I am grateful to Dr. Stepan A. Varban, Dmitri A. Varban and family in *Kazayak*, the Trandafilov family in *Avdarma*, Aliona Ialama and family in *Tomay* for showing me great kindness and receiving me into their homes. I am indebted to Galina S. Zaharia and Natalia V. Nacioglo for their assistance with Gagauz language materials. Stepan S. Bulgar offered advice and guidance on Gagauz historical materials for which I offer my thanks. I am also grateful to staff and students at *Komrat Devlet Üniversitesi*, and to the staff at the museum in Beşalma, the National Library and Academy of Sciences Library in Chişinău and the Romanian Academy of Sciences in Bucharest for their help and assistance. I would also like to express my gratitude to the Blagochin of Gagauzia & Taraklia of the Bishopric of Comrat & Cahul, Mitrofor Protoierey Piotr Kelesh, and the parish priests of all the villages mentioned in this thesis. Very special thanks go to my dear friend Nikolas L. Luka for his tireless assistance and encouragement in the field. I also owe a large debt of gratitude to Karl Peter Kirk and again to Nikolas Luka, who both read draft chapters of this thesis and offered invaluable comments and advice.

I would also like to acknowledge the financial support of the University of London Central Research Fund (2005), The Jordan Bequest (2005) and SOAS Postgraduate Fieldwork Award (2005), which enabled me to conduct my fieldwork in Moldova.

Thanks go to my colleagues and friends Stefania Travagnin, Chris Davis, David Azzopardi, Adil Khan, Lloyd Hamilton, Tim Graves, Franck Billé, Sang-Yeon Park, Chris Daily and Dr. Sian Hawthorne, who each offered valuable advice, support and

encouragement during the course of my PhD. Finally, my greatest thanks go to my mother for her selfless support and encouragement and to all my family and friends.

## Notes on Languages, Transliteration and Places names

I use the term *Gagauziya* to refer to the ethnic territory settled by the Gagauz in Moldova whereas the abbreviation UTAG, *Unitatea Teritorială Autonomia Găgăuzia*, and the term ‘Gagauz Autonomous Region’ are used to refer to the political and administrative entity within the Republic of Moldova. This political and administrative entity is also alternatively known officially in the Gagauz language as *Gagauziya* or *Gagauz Eri*.

History has bequeathed the wider geographical territory with which the study is concerned with a wealth of names, which refer to the successive state and administrative entities that have governed the region. In the interests of clarity when referring to the various historical units I use their full name; the ‘Principality of Moldavia’, this refers to the Principality that existed from the 14<sup>th</sup> century until the 1866 union with Wallachia to form Romania; ‘Romanian Moldavia’ refers to the western half of the old principality that today forms the eastern region of Romania, the Republic of Moldova is the official name of the current Soviet successor state on the territory, Bessarabia is used to refer to the territory of Moldavia that was annexed by the Russians in 1812 and to the same territories that were incorporated into Greater Romania in 1919. I use the English spelling ‘Budjak’ in preference to the Romanian *Bugeac* or the Gagauz and Turkish *Bucak* to refer to the geographical region of steppe in the southern part of Bessarabia that is today divided between the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine and which is home to the majority of Bessarabian Gagauz (see map 1, page 16).

All place names are given in the local official Gagauz form, as they appear on administrative maps of UTAG, and are printed in italics, for example *Kazayak*. Gagauz place names in Ukraine are given in the local Gagauz form in italic. The first time Gagauz place names occur they will be followed in parenthesis by the officially recognised Moldovan or Ukrainian name, for example *Kurçu* (Vinogradovka). All other place names are given in the national languages of the state in question or, in the case of internationally recognised locations such as Moscow, they are given in the standard English form (see table of locations, page 9).

Historically a number of variants of Latin and Cyrillic scripts have been employed to render the Gagauz idiom. In the main body of this thesis Gagauz language texts of oral origin appear in the Latin script and are spelt according to current Gagauz literary

convention (see table 2, page 10). However, many of the texts that appear in the main body of this thesis and in the appendices were originally hand written in the Cyrillic script and their authors did not follow precisely any one orthographic system; many texts combine Russian, Gagauz Cyrillic and Romanian (both Latin and Cyrillic) characters. Therefore Gagauz texts transliterated from Cyrillic into the Latin alphabet are given as spelt in the original and transliterated according to a combination of Library of Congress system and the 1957 Gagauz Cyrillic alphabet (see table 2, page 9). The guiding principle was to render them intelligible to readers of Turkish, whilst maintaining dialectical ‘flavour’ and local particularities that are reflected in spelling. Other bibliographical materials published using the Latin script of the 1930s appear as in the original (this applies mainly to the bibliographical material in appendix 1). Russian transliterations from Cyrillic also follow the Library of Congress system.

All translations from Gagauz, Romanian, Hungarian, Turkish and French are the authors own. Translations from Russian, German and Greek were privately commissioned.

#### 1. Table of locations

<b>Gagauz</b>	<b>Romanian or Ukrainian official place name</b>
<i>Avdarma</i>	Avdarma
<i>Baurçu</i>	Baurci
<i>Beşalma</i>	Beşalma
<i>Beşgöz (Kopkoy)</i>	Beşghioz
<i>Çadır-Lunga</i>	Ceadâr-Lunga
<i>Gaydar</i>	Gaidar
<i>Kazayak</i>	Cazaclia
<i>Komrat</i>	Comrat
<i>Kurçu</i>	Vinogradovka
<i>Küçük Baurçu</i>	Baurci (Căuşeni raion)
<i>Tomay</i>	Tomai



## 2. Table of Gagauz Scripts

Standard Latin	1957 Cyrillic	Library of Congress Russian	Sound value in English
A a	А а	А	a in father
- ä	Ä ä	Я я	the a sound in mare*
Ă ă	Э э	Э э	a in about (not widely used)
B b	Б б	Б б	b in bat
C c	Ж ж	Ж ж	j in jump
Ç ç	Ч ч	Ч ч	ch
D d	Д д	Д д	d
E e	Е е	Е е	e in set
- ê	Э э	Э э	e in leer or a in about
F f	Ф ф	Ф ф	f
G g	Г г	Г г	g
H h	Х х	Х х	h
I i	Ы ы	Ы ы	similar to i in cousin
Î î	И и	И и	e in sleep
J j	Ж ж	Ж ж	j (in words of foreign origin)
K k	К к	К к	k
L l	Л л	Л л	l
M m	М м	М м	m
N n	Н н	Н н	n
O o	О о	О о	o in mole
Ö ö	Ӗ ӓ	Ӗ ӓ	ö in Köln**
P p	П п	П п	p
R r	Р р	Р р	r
S s	С с	С с	s in sat
Ş ş	Ш ш	Ш ш	sh in
T t	Т т	Т т	t
Ț ț	Ц ц	Ц ц	ts in cats
U u	У у	У у	u in mule
Ü ü	Ӱ ӱ	Ю ю	u in French tu***
V v	В в	В в	v
Y y	Й й	Ы ы	y in yacht
Z z	З з	З з	z

\* я is also used to represent the sound ya at the beginning of words.

\*\* In Gagauz usage the Cyrillic character Ӗ is also used to represent the Russian sound eo as in names such as Georgi and Feodor and yo as in yoghurt.

\*\*\* The Cyrillic ю is rendered as yu in yummy.

## Glossary of frequently used terms and abbreviations in Gagauz and Russian

<i>Allah</i> (Gag.)	God, the Lord. The Gagauz language recognises two alternative spellings: <i>Allah</i> and <i>Allaa</i> . In this study wherever the term occurs in transcriptions of oral material I use <i>Allah</i> . If quoting from written sources I use the spelling found in the source text.
<i>batuška</i> (Rus., Gag.)	priest, father (colloquial)
<i>dua</i> (Gag.)	prayer (see pages 213-214)
<i>epistoliya</i> (Gag.)	Gagauz rendering of the Greek <i>epistolē</i> , here referring to apocryphal texts, generally of an escatological nature, in the Gagauz language (see page 80, note 166)
<i>Gagauziya</i> (Gag.)	Commonly used term to refer to UTAG (see below) and also ethnic territory of Gagauz settlement in Moldova and Ukraine
<i>ilaçci</i> (Gag.)	healer, pl. <i>ilaçcilär</i> (see page 143-144)
<i>imdat</i> (Gag.)	help, aid or in a religious context salvation.
<i>kliseci</i> (Gag.)	Frequent church-goer, someone who fulfils an official function within the Church from the Greek <i>Εκκλησία</i> .
<i>matuška</i> (Rus., Gag.)	wife of the priest (colloquial)
<i>molitva</i> (Rus.)	prayer (see pages 213-214)
<i>okumak</i> (Gag.)	charm or incantation, pl. <i>okumaklar</i> (see page 144-145)
<i>okuyucu</i> (Gag.)	user of charms or incantations, pl <i>okuyucular</i> (see page 144)
<i>Panaiya</i> (Gag.)	The Mother of God from the Greek <i>Παναγία</i> , meaning ‘all-holy’.
<i>Panaiyanın duşu</i> (Gag.)	The Dream of the Mother of God – apocryphal legend and prayer
<i>tetradka</i> (Rus.)	notebook, school exercise book
UTAG	<i>Unitatea Teritorială Autonomă Găgăuzia</i> , the official name of the Gagauz Autonomous Region.

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## INTRODUCTION

The Gagauz are a minority living in the southern reaches of the Republic of Moldova. While adhering to the majority religion of Orthodox Christianity, their mother-tongue is a variety of Turkish, a fact that in conjunction with their cultural heritage has shaped their religious identity and transformed their religious practices. The aim of this thesis is to explore Gagauz religion from the perspective of lay religious practice. In doing so I take up the ongoing debate on 'folk' or 'popular' religion and aim to demonstrate how, in the case of the Gagauz, the academic category of 'folk religion' and the field of 'folk' religious practice are instrumental in the construction of Gagauz religious identity. This is explored on two levels. Firstly, on the level of the national political, clerical and academic discourse on the origins, ethno-genesis and religion of the Gagauz, and secondly, on the level of practice, examining how Church perspectives and lay agency operate at the micro-level during actual episodes of religious practice.

The starting point of this research project is the 'texts' of Gagauz religion. The way in which the 'texts' on Gagauz religion generated by scholarly, ecclesial and political discourse are used in the instrumentalisation of religious identities and practices in the construction of Gagauz national identity and how, in turn, this has influenced popular religious consciousness is discussed. This is followed by an exploration of how the language of the 'primary texts' of Gagauz religious practice, both liturgical/canonical and lay/apocryphal texts, shape religious consciousness. Both sets of 'texts' are explored within the wider social, historical and political contexts that underpin and define them. Finally, the role of 'performance' of the 'texts' in the creation, institutionalisation, and transmission of lay religious practice is considered. Each of these dimensions of text, context and performance highlight the role of language in the contested field of practice of 'folk religion' situated between the lay and 'official' institutions of Gagauz Orthodoxy.<sup>1</sup>

In this way the 'folk religion' of the Gagauz is considered to be a 'site' where macro-national, political and religious discourses intersect with micro-community level religious practice in the construction of religious identities.

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<sup>1</sup> Webb Keane, in her discussions of the workings of religious language, suggests the significance of the relationship between these three factors. See W. Keane, 'Religious Language', *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 26 (1997), p. 48.

This research project gives 'methodological priority' to religious 'practice', which is both empirically observable and objectifiable. In this way, as Martin Riesebrodt suggests, we can help 'shift the focus from intellectual metadiscourses to practitioners' and in so doing overturn the value-laden distinctions between 'folk' and 'official' religion that can arise from 'belief-centred' approaches to religion.<sup>2</sup> A 'practice-based' approach to contemporary 'popular' or 'folk' religion presupposes an engagement with religious practitioners. As Marion Bowman rightly points out, studies of religion have often centred on what people 'should do' rather than what they 'actually do' in practice. The primary means at the disposal of the researcher of engaging with religion 'as practised' is through fieldwork.<sup>3</sup> Therefore the main component of this research project is based on the encounter with Gagauz religious practitioners and practices in the field.

The Gagauz, and their religion, have historically been approached through the nationalist political discourse on their origins, ethnogenesis and race. In this way religious language and practice have been instrumentalized by competing national, political and 'official' religious entities in the pursuit of their territorial, political and economic interests. The resulting 'meta-narrative' on Gagauz religion has entered popular consciousness and helped mould Gagauz religious identities. At the same time the 'micro-discourse' that emerges through everyday religious language and practice, contingent as it is on the shifting social, economic and political context of post-Soviet Moldova, shapes the religious reality and lives of practitioners. In this sense 'folk religion' is a 'discourse' that shapes identities from the 'top down' and also a contested 'field of practice' that moulds the micro-social realities of practitioners. This thesis explores how Gagauz religious identity is contingent on both these dimensions of what we call 'folk religion' and how the agency and activities of religious practitioners work counter to the bipolar model of 'folk' versus 'official' religion that is at the root of the academic discourse grounded in theological and Church perspectives.

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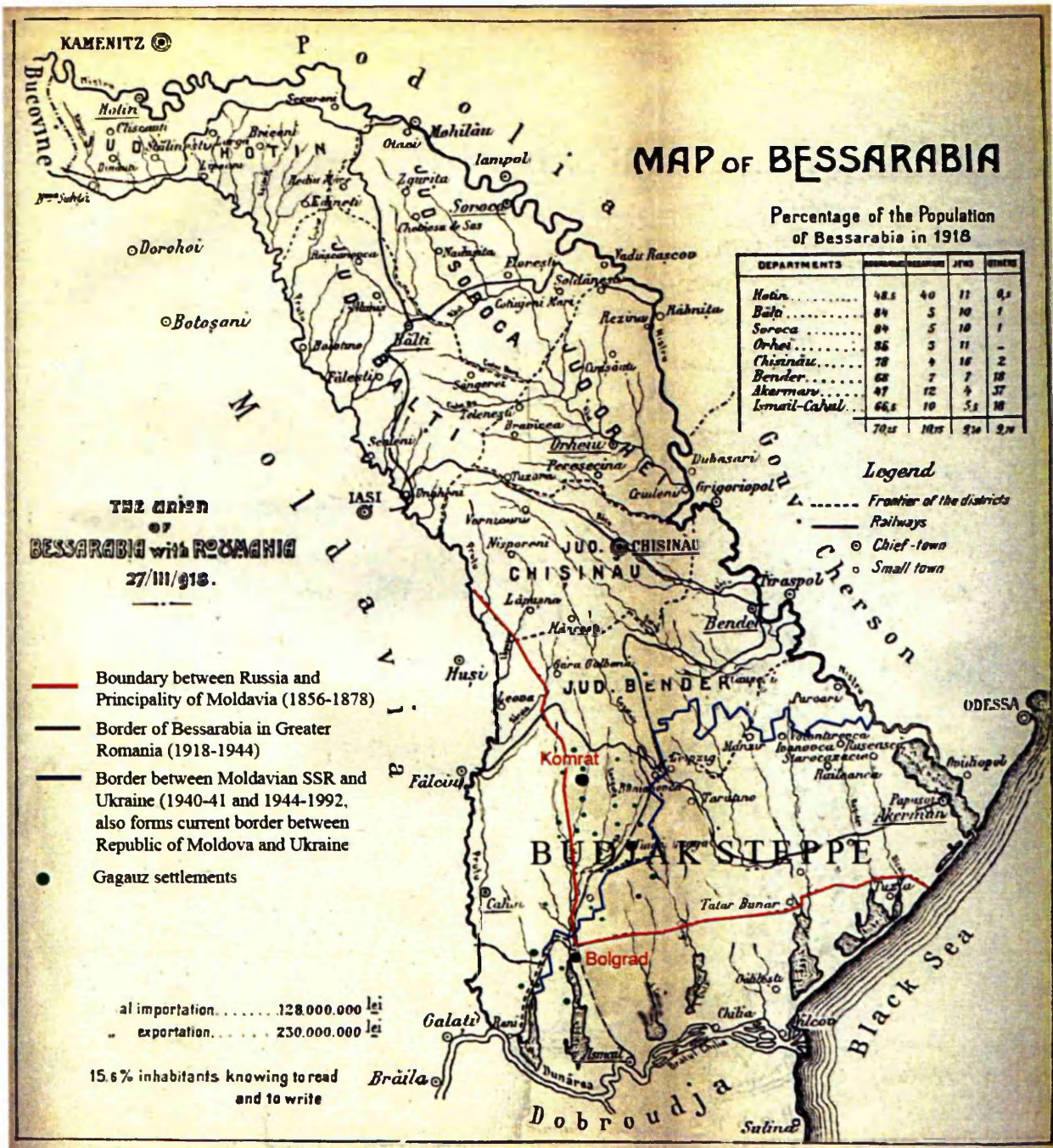
<sup>2</sup> M. Riesebrodt, 'Religion in Global Perspective', in M. Juergensmeyer (ed.), *Global Religions*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003, pp. 99-100.

<sup>3</sup> M. Bowman, *Phenomenology, Fieldwork and Folk Religion*, British Association for the Study of Religion Occasional Papers, Cardiff: British Association for the Study of Religion, 1992, p. 3. See also M. Bowman, 'Response to Steven Sutcliffe', *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion*, 10 (1998), pp. 275-278.

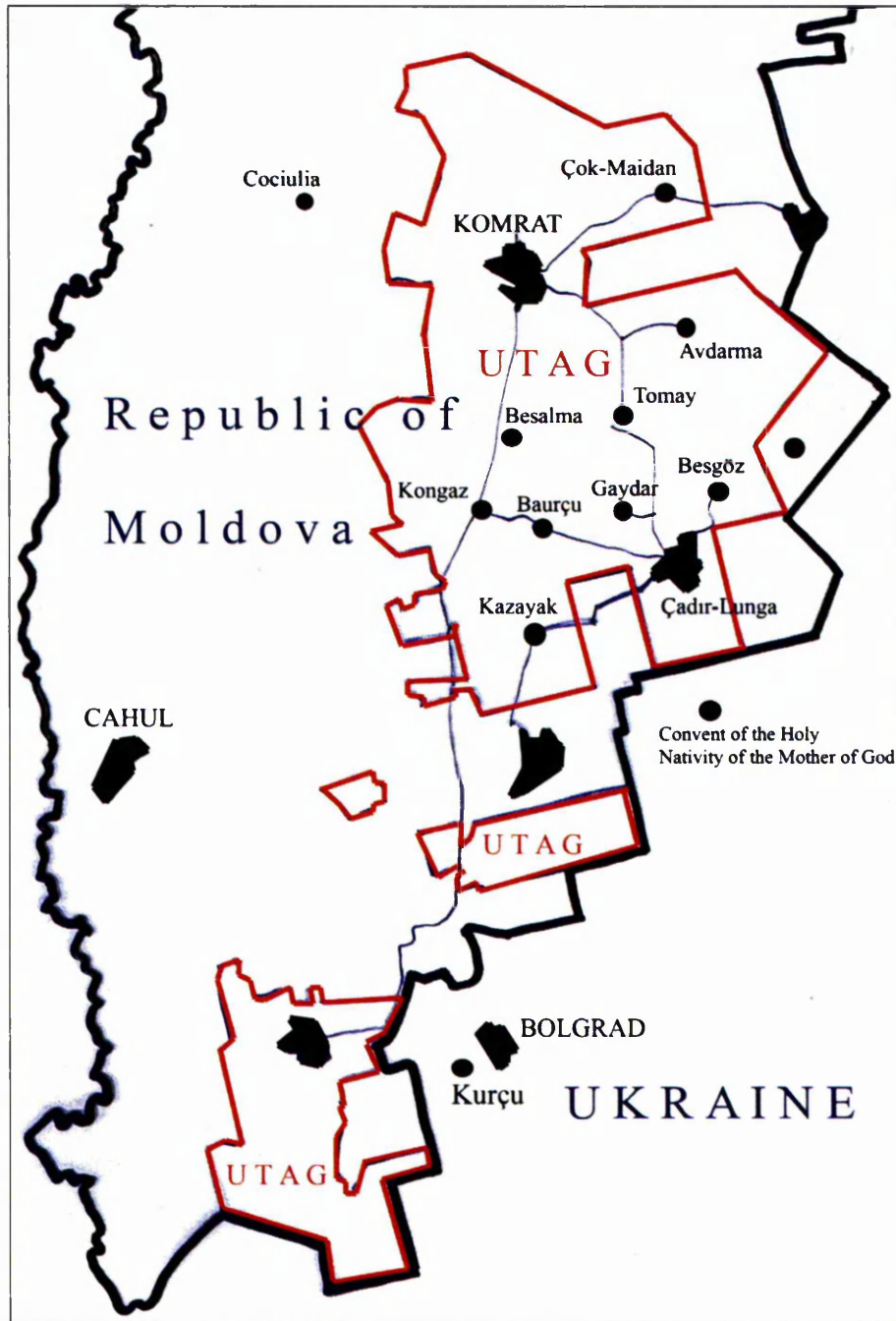
#### i. The Gagauz of Bessarabia and Orthodoxy

This research project is concerned with the Gagauz population that lives in the southern region of Republic of Moldova and in the adjacent Odessa *oblast* or region in the extreme south west of Ukraine (see map 1, page 16). This territory, which at various times in its history has been known as southern Bessarabia, the Budjak (or *Bucak*) steppe or Southern Moldova, has for many centuries constituted a border region between the cultural and geographical spheres of influence of several competing empires and nations. In the last 250 years Russia (and the Soviet Union), Turkey, Ukraine, and Romania have all laid claim to the region and today this portion of steppe remains divided between two of the successor states of the Soviet Union, Moldova and Ukraine.

The Gagauz, whose spoken idiom is closely akin to Turkish, share this region with many other peoples: Bulgarians, Ukrainians, Moldovans, and Russians, to name but a few. The majority of the population of the region are colonists who arrived in various waves of migration beginning in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century. Amidst this ethnic mosaic there are some compact areas of Gagauz settlement that since 1994 have enjoyed a special political and economic status within the Republic of Moldova. The Gagauz Autonomous Region (see map 2, page 17), officially known as *Unitate Teritorială Autonomă Găgăuzia* or *UTAG* for short, has a population of 155,646 according to the 2004 Moldovan census, of which 127,835 are recorded as ethnic Gagauz (with a further 19,665 Gagauz living outside the autonomous region mostly in the neighbouring *raions* or districts and in the capital Chişinău). Neighbouring Ukraine has a population of approximately 30,000 who live mainly in Odessa *Oblast* on territory close to the border with Moldova. The Gagauz account for 4.4% of the total population of the Republic of Moldova. In this study I shall refer to the Gagauz of Moldova and Ukraine together as the Gagauz of Bessarabia.







Map 2. Gagauz Autonomous Region (UTAG) showing main Gagauz settlements referred to in this study.



The Gagauz are a minority in more than one sense. In their present homeland in Southern Moldova and Ukraine they form an ethnic and linguistic minority, being Turkish speakers in mainly Romanian and Slavic-speaking regions. Within the wider context of the Turkic or Turkish-speaking world they also represent a religious minority on account of their Orthodox Christian faith. Indeed, it is the religion of the Gagauz that first drew the attention of the wider world and that has made them such an intriguing puzzle for scholars over the last century or so. They are also located on a strategic fault-line between competing powers in the region. The combination of these two factors, ethno-linguistic affiliations with Turkey and by proxy with the Islamic world, and devout Orthodox Christianity with strong historical ties to Russia, Romania and Bulgaria, gave birth to nationalist discourses on Gagauz religion, ethnogenesis and race that have defined not only the direction of scholarly interest but also the legitimacy of research projects on the Gagauz. The precise nature of the way in which ethnic and religious dimensions have become conflated in the construction of Gagauz identities forms the main theme of chapter one.

Closely linked to the religious dimension of the discourse on ethnogenesis are a series of observations and remarks on Gagauz 'popular' or 'folk' religious practice that point toward their supposed heterodoxy. Early commentators on Gagauz religion chose to highlight Islamic, pagan and shamanic elements that were perceived mainly on the basis of textual and linguistic sources. In some ways this is unsurprising, given the fact that this demographically small and geographically peripheral minority attracted the attention of the outside world in the first place only because of their incongruous combination of Orthodox Christianity and a perceived Turkish ethnicity.

The first representations of Gagauz religion can be found in the works of the Russian army general-turned-ethnographer V. A. Moshkoff who spent the closing years of the 19<sup>th</sup> century recording the language, customs and folklore of the Gagauz of Bessarabia and subsequently published his findings in a number of substantial editions.<sup>4</sup> A selection of folktales from Moshkoff later appeared in English translation in C. Fillingham Coxwell's

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<sup>4</sup> The first of his these works, published as a series of studies, covers a whole range of topics including Gagauz language, music, customs and religion. See V. Moskoff, 'Gagauzy Benderskago Uezda', *Etnograficheskoe Obozrenie*, vol. XLIV, XLVIII, XLIX, LI, LIV & LV Moscow (1900-1901). This was followed by a collection of Gagauz folktales, V. Moskoff, 'Narecia Bessarabskikh Gagauzov', in Radloff, W., (ed.) *Proben Der Volklitteratur Der Türkischen Stamme*, 10, St. Petersburg, 1904.

1925 edition of *Siberian Folktales*, the content of which prompted the editor to state, 'There has not been with this people a complete suppression by the Church of that nature worship on which the Orthodox faith was grafted in Russia.'<sup>5</sup> In the notes relating to one of these tales he again interprets Gagauz beliefs as being not entirely Orthodox: 'This brief legend begins as if it were of Orthodox Russian origin, but ends in a manner decidedly pagan...The Gagauz are probably but nominally Christian, just as the Tcheremisses remain partly heathen and partly Mahommedan.'<sup>6</sup> Later, commenting on one of the folktales translated by Coxwell, Mircea Eliade also finds elements of pre-Christian beliefs, although he uses them to illustrate the shamanic motif of 'rebirth from the bones' rather than Slav nature worship.<sup>7</sup> However, it is the perceived Islamic dimension of Gagauz religion that has given rise to most interest on the part of historians, ethnographers and linguists. During the Gagauz 'national awakening' of the 1930s and in the present post-Soviet era, when Turkey has become a key player in regional geo-politics, Islamic and Turkic elements in the 'folk' religious practices of the Gagauz have been instrumentalised by national political discourse in order to create capital for the national causes of the various players in the region.

The dominant paradigm in the study of all 'folk' phenomena in the Balkans and Eastern Europe remains, despite earnest attempts to free the discipline from its romantic nationalist and Marxist ideological past, the search for the pure and authentic roots of the nation.<sup>8</sup> Scholarship on Gagauz 'folklore', under the heavy influence of Russian, Romanian and Bulgarian scholarly traditions, is therefore negotiated between the competing discourses on 'origins' of more powerful neighbours and overlords. The debate on 'folk' or 'popular religion', especially with regard to religious and ethnic minority groups, is therefore also a political one that is bound up with structures of power and domination.

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<sup>5</sup> C. F. Coxwell, *Siberian and Other Folk-Tales*, London: The C.W. Daniel Company, 1925, p. 401.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., p. 435.

<sup>7</sup> M. Eliade, *Shamanism: Archaic techniques of ecstasy*, London: Penguin Arkana, 1989, p. 161.

<sup>8</sup> In relation to the Russian and Soviet traditions see: R. Dorson, *Folklore in the Modern World*, The Hague: Mouton, 1978, pp.17-19, F. Oinas, 'Political Uses and Themes of Folklore in the Soviet Union', in Oinas, F. (ed.), *Folklore, Nationalism and Politics*, Ohio: Slavica, 1978, pp. 77-95, and F. Oinas, 'Folklore and Politics in the Soviet Union', *Slavic Review*, 32: 1 (1973), pp. 45-58.

The classification and categorisation of religious phenomena of a people as 'folk' or 'popular' can also have the effect of relegating them to a subordinate position in relation to the 'official' religion of the dominant culture, nation or linguistic group. Because the 'folk' religious dimension of religious lives is often associated with the pre-Christian, pre-historic mythic past of ethnic nations the study of 'folk religion', and folklore in general, takes on the characteristics of a historical science.<sup>9</sup> The search for 'folkloric' data under such circumstances overwhelmingly tends to valorise 'archaisms' and underplays the dynamism and fluidity of religious cultural change. This process also contributed in Eastern Europe to the reification of the bipolar model of high Christian culture vs. pagan survival. In the case of Bulgarian scholarship for example the 'deep pagan roots' of the nation could be freely explored as they posed no threat to the hegemony of the communist party. Whereas the Christian and Church related expressions of 'folk' religiosity seemed to challenge the political and social order.<sup>10</sup>

The relations between minority groups and Church structures and hierarchies often mirror the tensions that exist between minorities and central state structures. At various times over the past 200 years, the Gagauz have experienced varying degrees of alienation from the Church due to neglect, their peripheral location and oppression by Church authorities. The debate on the nature of 'folk' religion and the language that scholars employ in their representations of religious practices are therefore of central significance to research projects that address the religions of minority peoples and cultures.

Since the end of socialism and the break-up of the Soviet Union the prospects for the study of religion in Central and Eastern Europe have altered dramatically. In the last 15 years there has been a steady increase in the number of scholarly works dealing with religious themes. Much of this new interest has been directed towards historical studies of 'folk', 'popular' or 'lived' religion, aspects of religious life that under socialism were regarded as superstitious and backward.<sup>11</sup> Many of these works reflect current trends in Western scholarship and engage critically with contemporary debates on approaches to the

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<sup>9</sup> See in this regard R. Ivanova, R., 'New Orientations in Bulgarian Ethnology and Folkloristics', *Ethnologica Balkanica*, 2 (1998), pp. 225-231.

<sup>10</sup> G. Vălcinova, 'Ethnographie et folklore du religieux en Bulgarie: "un tango de lenine"?', *Ethnologica Balkanica*, 2 (1998), pp. 145-165.

<sup>11</sup> V. Kivelson and R. Greene, 'Introduction' in V. Kivelson and R. Greene (eds.) *Orthodox Russian: Belief and Practice Under the Tsars*, Pennsylvania State University Press, 2003, p. 1. See also Ivanova, R., 'New Orientations', pp. 225-231.

historical study of religious phenomena. In particular, a number of scholars in the region have begun to discuss the nature of 'folk' or 'popular' religious phenomena in 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century Orthodox Russia.<sup>12</sup> Significant amongst these are studies that engage critically with the Russian 'academic myth' of *dvoeverie* or 'double belief'.<sup>13</sup> This term, which was created and adopted by Russian scholarship to describe the persistence of a pagan worldview in the belief system of the Russian peasantry, presents a 'binary model' of Orthodoxy and paganism in opposition or tension within the Russian religious psyche. This historically inherited representation of Russian Orthodox 'popular religion' portrays the Russian peasant with a 'divided mind' that 'juggles two separate sets of beliefs and rituals, one Christian and one not'.<sup>14</sup> This kind of conception of dual religious worlds or realities, one 'official' and the other 'folk', that compete within the mind of the believer is one that has helped shape and define western scholarship on religion.

This study aims to bring the awareness of these concerns over academic language and method in the study of 'folk' or 'popular' religion to studies of contemporary post-Socialist Orthodoxy. Post-Soviet society presents an exciting and relatively 'fluid' religious milieu. Lay practitioners, faced with decades of Church absence from public religious life, became autonomous actors and, following the advent of *Glasnost*, began to rebuild Church buildings and structures and then, in many cases, entered local ethnic, national or linguistic struggles with the resurgent clerical authorities. The Moldovan case presents a particularly clear example of how ecclesial elites came into conflict with newly emergent or resurgent ethno-national movements following the break-up of the Soviet Union (see footnote 176, page 81). New religious movements have also sprung up as self-proclaimed revivals of previously suppressed 'sects' or the result of missionary activity from the West. Across the region national Churches are reasserting their right to a voice in public life and beginning to influence national and international politics. Each of these aspects of post-Soviet religious life can be observed on a local level in Gagauz society. For

<sup>12</sup> See in particular studies in the following volumes: J. Himka and A. Zayarnyuk (eds.), *Letters from Heaven: Popular Religion in Russia and Ukraine*, Toronto, Buffalo and London: University of Toronto Press, 2006, M. Steinberg, and H. Coleman (eds.), *Sacred Stories: Religion and Spirituality in Modern Russia*, Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2007, and V. Kivelson and R. Greene (eds.) *Orthodox Russian: Belief and Practice Under the Tsars*, Pennsylvania State University Press, 2003.

<sup>13</sup> See in particular S. Rock, *Popular Religion in Russia: 'Double Belief' and the Making of an Academic Myth*, London and New York, 2007.

<sup>14</sup> D. Gay, 'On the Christianity of Incantations', in J. Roper (ed.), *Charms and Charming in Europe*, Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2004, p. 33.

the purposes of this research project, one of the main benefits of selecting the Gagauz as a focus for field research is the geographically and linguistically bounded nature of the group, who, despite their discrete ethnic, linguistic and political identity, are also closely tied, through Russia and Turkey, to supra-national political and economic developments in the wider region.

The issues described above, which link the concept of 'folk religion' with macro-national political discourses and micro-level religious practice, and that also link Gagauz religious identity with geo-political interests, form the rationale of this research project. I hope to demonstrate in the chapters that follow how distinctions and categorisations made by and through structures of power, be they political, ecclesial or scholarly, translate into the sphere of contemporary religious practice and how the agency of lay practitioners establishes 'institutional' facts that are at odds with these representations.

## ii. The discourse on 'folk religion'

Much of the debate on the nature of 'folk' or 'popular' religion has centred on the search for an appropriate terminology to help overcome the inherited prejudices of an academic field that largely grew out of theological and ecclesial concerns.<sup>15</sup> The weight of received scholarship, as Primiano rightly suggests, has resulted in 'insistent acts of misnaming' that negatively colour the way that traditions and practices labelled as 'folk religion' or 'popular religion', are perceived. The implication behind the use of terminology such as 'folk' or 'popular' religion is that there exists some pristine phenomenon called 'religion'. This 'unadulterated' form of religion is considered to be the kind that is generated and reproduced by elites and that is reified in the form of hierarchies and institutions whose authority very often springs from a 'holy' canon of authoritative texts.<sup>16</sup> Aspects of religion, and particularly religious practice that fall outside the confines of these structures are labelled as 'folk' or 'popular' on the basis that they don't fulfil this criteria for the higher-order designation of simply 'religion'. In this way 'folk religion' comes to stand in a bipolar position to 'religion' as represented by the institutions of 'official' religious bodies. Within this basic bipolar paradigm there exist numerous other binary distinctions,

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<sup>15</sup> On the origins of the term 'folk religion' in Western scholarship see. D. Yoder, 'Toward a Definition of Folk Religion', *Western Folklore*, pp. 2-15.

<sup>16</sup> L. Primiano, 'Vernacular Religion and the Search for Method in Religious Folklife', *Western Folklore*, 54 (1995), p. 39.

such as those between prayer and incantation or canon and apocrypha, some of which we shall examine in closer detail in the chapters that follow.

It is not the aim of this thesis to explore the vast number of associations that the terms 'folk religion' and 'popular religion' conjure up or the numerous meanings that have been ascribed to them. We have already mentioned above that the notion of 'folk religion' has been associated with syncretic or heterodox traditions, with the idea of the duality of belief, with pagan survivals, and with the idea of authenticity and purity in ethno-nationalist discourse, to name but a few.<sup>17</sup> Assumptions about the object of study that these ideas promote suggest that 'folk religion' or 'popular religion' is somehow unreflective, anti-progressive, rooted in traditional society and resistant to change or merely forms a 'trail of cultural leftovers'.<sup>18</sup>

It is clear that there are numerous problems with the terminology that the academic discipline of Religious Studies has inherited from a Western Christian scholarly tradition. This problem is perhaps most acute when applying this terminology to non-Western or non-Christian traditions. However, the 'Christianity' of the term 'folk religion' is particularly powerful in a European context as its origins lie directly in the attempts of the various Christian Churches to locate, define, and constrain structures of religious practice and meaning that are enacted and legitimated beyond the confines of their institutions. In this sense the term, in its origins, can be viewed as an instrument of control. As Scribner points out, 'polarities, inversions and contrarities' were 'embedded in the mindset' of previous ages and that they were part of the very real power struggles of those times.<sup>19</sup> The fact that scholars across disciplines continue to use the terminology of past disputes and 'reinsert' it into current scholarly work perpetuates the value judgements inherent in past representations of religion and religious lives.

Often definitions of 'folk religion' that attempt to transcend or circumvent these inherited problems of language inadvertently prop up the underlying assumptions that created the category in the first place. Don Yoder's definition of 'folk religion', which talks of its 'relatively unorganised character',<sup>20</sup> or definitions of 'popular' religion which

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<sup>17</sup> For a summary of the various perspectives see Yoder, 'Toward a Definition'.

<sup>18</sup> D. Pals, *Seven Theories of Religion*, New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996, p. 22.

<sup>19</sup> B. Scribner, 'Introduction' in B. Scribner and T. Johnson (eds.) *Popular Religion in Germany and Central Europe 1400-1800*, London and Hampshire: MacMillan, 1996, pp. 1-15.

<sup>20</sup> Yoder, 'Toward a Definition', p. 10.

distinguish it from 'organised' or 'institutionalised' forms of religion merely perpetuate the fundamental distinction that valorises what is perceived to be ordered, structured and institutionalised. Ellen Badone, in her discussion of the problems of defining 'popular religion', highlights the opposition between 'informal system' and 'formal structures'. Although she goes on to stress that this relationship is 'dialectical' in character and not simply oppositional, a distinction remains between simple 'religion', which is 'formal and structured', and an 'other' that is not.<sup>21</sup>

The social sciences, and especially sociology, are also implicated in the construction of religion as an object of study that can be understood primarily through the empirical study of highly 'organised' religious institutions. And as Callum Brown neatly asserts: 'Social science has privileged a 'rationalist' approach to religion which assigns importance to 'formal religion' and which denigrates or ignores 'folk religion', 'superstition', and acts of personal faith not endorsed by the churches.'<sup>22</sup> This general orientation towards explicitly institutional forms of religion can be traced from the founding fathers of sociology Émile Durkheim and Max Weber down to the 'scientific sociology' of Pierre Bourdieu.<sup>23</sup> The Weberian taxonomical approach is a classic example of how advances in the 'religion of rational ideas' are tied to progress, modernisation and the establishment of bureaucratic institutions. Durkheim too associated true religion with the institution of 'church' and causally linked more advanced forms of religion with complex forms of social organisation.<sup>24</sup> His nephew and protégé Marcel Mauss also considered religion to be 'an organised activity in Churches' according to the Western Christian model.<sup>25</sup> In this sense the foundational concepts of the sociology of religion are rooted in the religious establishments of Western Church structures, which, according to Cristián Parker, render them incapable of handling newly emergent 'popular religious' and 'magico-religious' phenomena.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> E. Badone, 'Introduction' in E. Badone (ed.) *Religious Orthodoxy and Popular Faith in European Society*, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1990, p. 6.

<sup>22</sup> Brown, C., *The Death of Christian Britain: Understanding Secularisation 1800-2000*, London: Routledge, 2001, p. 11.

<sup>23</sup> T. Rey, *Bourdieu on Religion: Imposing Faith and Legitimacy*, London and Oakville: Equinox, 2007, p. 9.

<sup>24</sup> Yoder, 'Toward a Definition', p. 10.

<sup>25</sup> C. Parker, 'Magico-popular religion' in Contemporary Society: Towards a Post-Western Sociology of Religion', in J. Beckford and J. Wallis (eds.), *Theorising Religion: Classical and Contemporary Debates*, Aldershot and Burlington: Ashgate, 2006, p. 64.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., p. 65.

### iii. On method and methodology

The problem of how to overcome the value-laden distinctions between the two spheres of religious life that scholarship has bequeathed to researchers of religion can be approached on at least two levels. The first, proposed by Primiano, is on the level of language and advises the abandonment of the terminology and its replacement with a more considered and objective lexicon. The second approach relates more closely to research method and suggests that decisions made in the design of research projects by the researcher are critical in overcoming inherited biases.

The first approach is, by itself, insufficient. By merely replacing the term 'folk' with an alternative, 'vernacular' is Primiano's preferred option, we do nothing to alter the classificatory bias that we adopt when we approach the object of study. We continue to locate together certain beliefs and practices, such as the belief in guardian angels and the use of healing incantations, in an arbitrary manner in distinction to Trinitarian theology and liturgical worship. Therefore the danger is that we merely replace one label for another. Primiano justly points out that at the base of both 'official' and lay beliefs and practices we find the individual and that at the level of the individual, and his or her personal belief system, there exists no distinction between 'official' and 'non-official aspects'.<sup>27</sup> However, this does nothing to acknowledge the fact that individuals who belong to hierarchies and elites will continue to consider their version of practice or belief to be 'right practice' and 'right belief' and to assert this in the religious community regardless of whether scholars assign the label 'vernacular' to both in an attempt to 'contest unequal power relations'.<sup>28</sup> Marion Bowman goes down a similar line in her triangular representation of the relationship between 'official', 'folk' and 'individual' religion when she states '...there is no such thing as pure religion, whatever the religious tradition. Official, folk and individual components interact to produce what, for each person, constitutes religion.'<sup>29</sup> With the dimension of the 'individual' placed squarely within the frame by Bowman and Primiano, they both go on to highlight that in order to transcend inherited distinctions and categorisations that cloud the study of 'folk religion', whatever label it is given, it needs to move from theory to method. For Primiano a 'method of practice, a way of doing

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<sup>27</sup> Primiano, 'Vernacular Religion', p. 47.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., p. 47.

<sup>29</sup> Bowman, *Phenomenology*, p. 7.



ethnography' employing an inductive approach to religious phenomena is what is called for; from Bowman's perspective 'phenomenological fieldwork' holds the key. The important contribution to the debate of both commentators is the recognition that the decisions of the scholar in designing a research project and the methods she or he employs largely determine how the 'folk' dimension of religious practice and belief are represented and evaluated. In this way both emphasise the encounter between the reflexive researcher and the researched in the field as the most appropriate method of bringing together the role of individuals, social groups or units, the traditionally cited 'home' of 'folklore', and institutions in studies of lived religion. In this way field research is also a way of countering and undermining the kind of totalising views of 'world religions' that have been constructed by de-contextualised Western academic textual studies.

Before moving on to look at method in the field, there is one more important point to be made with regard to fieldwork, which relates to the reflexivity of the researcher. The encounter that takes place in the 'field of practice', and here we should understand 'field of practice' to mean both the 'practice' of religion and the 'practice' of the fieldworker, also offers the researcher the opportunity to make, as Gavin Flood puts it, a 'critical break' with the 'objectivist mode of knowledge' and enter into a reflexive relationship with the objectivity of the object and the inherited biases and structures of theory and method.<sup>30</sup> By focusing on language within the 'field of practice', I hope, as Gavin Flood has suggested, to highlight the dialogical and situated nature of enquiry. Just as the religious practices that are the object of study are located within their social contexts, so are the practices that the researcher employs in approaching her or his object of study. The intentionality behind the method should be appreciated in order to 'see how the structures and biases within theory relate to religious practices and ideologies'. It is intended that the application of method be transparent in the present study in order to avoid a 'façade of neutrality and objectivity'.<sup>31</sup> It is hoped that the description of methodology and method presented below goes some way to achieving this aim.

This call for scholars of religion to engage in fieldwork in order to do justice to dimensions of religion beyond the structures and institutions of 'official religion' has been taken a step further methodologically by sociologist Martin Riesebrodt. He has proposed a

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<sup>30</sup> G. Flood, *Beyond Phenomenology: Rethinking the Study of Religion*, London and New York: Continuum, 2006, pp. 35-38.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 37-38.

'methodological priority of practices' as a way of overcoming value judgments, either implicit or explicit, about religious phenomena. He highlights in particular the 'evolutionist or developmental schemes' that are the result of the classicist Western anthropological and sociological traditions, themselves the product of a primarily Protestant Christian Western tradition, as being responsible for the kind of arbitrary distinctions that categorise religions into higher and lower forms. By shifting the primary methodological perspective to the sphere of 'practice' and away from religious 'belief and experiences', Riesebrodt suggests that attention can be directed away from the kind of normative totalising views of religious traditions that Western scholarship has produced. In the past, 'practice' has largely been viewed as a second-order phenomenon in relation to religious belief and experience and has been interpreted accordingly as the 'enactment' or 'reflection' of what is believed. This kind of 'deductive' interpretation of 'practice' inherently favours and promotes theological perspectives on religion. Theologians, religious scholars and clerics, and the 'rich construction of worldviews, cosmologies, and complex symbol systems' that they arbitrate become the 'natural' centre of religious traditions and attention is deflected away from communities and groups of religious practitioners.<sup>32</sup> The goal of Riesebrodt's practice-based approach therefore, by shifting 'the focus away from intellectual meta-discourses to practitioners, from a "theological" to a "pragmatic perspective"', is to formulate a theory of religion that makes sense of religious activity and actors in the modern world.<sup>33</sup>

The significance of taking a practice-based approach to religious phenomena has also been recognised in the field of historical studies. William Christian highlights that the notion of 'popular' religion is more properly understood as 'religion as practised'. For Christian, studies of 'religion as practised' are by necessity firmly rooted in their historical and social context and in this sense are the only legitimate studies of what can be called 'popular' religion.<sup>34</sup> Practice-based approaches of the kind proposed by both Riesebrodt and Christian attempt to liberate representations of religious practice made by scholars from the hegemony of officially sanctioned discourses on textual interpretation and minutely formulated doctrinal debates. Practices, by their very nature, occur at specific points in time and place and as such are not immune to environmental factors that influence all human social activities.

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<sup>32</sup> Riesebrodt, 'Religion', pp. 97-100.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., p. 100.

<sup>34</sup> Badone, 'Religious Orthodoxy', p. 6.

Riesebrodt delineates the sphere of religious practice on the basis of three central assumptions, which I shall present here in full.

(1) There exist superhuman, extraordinary, “amazing”, in modern Western terms generally “supernatural” personal or impersonal powers; (2) these powers control dimensions of human/social life that normal social actors cannot control directly by their own power; and (3) social actors are able to gain access to these powers.<sup>35</sup>

According to this model, there exists no categorical distinction on the basis of official institutional status between social actors that gain access to superhuman powers. The religious dimension of practice relies entirely on the existence of superhuman extraordinary powers and the ability of some or all social actors to gain access to them. This basic understanding of religious practice will be explored further in relation to Gagauz practices in the chapters that follow, especially with regard to assumptions about healing and magic (see chapter 4 and 5) and prayer (chapter 6 and 7).

Riesebrodt goes on to make one other very important observation that connects religious practice with the concept of a ‘religious institution’. In sociological terms an institution is considered to be comprised of social practices that are established and ordered by social norms, which through their repetition and propagation have a major significance in the social order. The religious institution adds one other important dimension to this basic model.

...Religious institutions can be defined as rules and norms that regulate the interaction between human beings and superhuman powers, the discourse about these powers, their nature, significance, and interventions into our lives, as well as the religious penetration of everyday life.<sup>36</sup>

The relationship between ‘practice’ and ‘institution’ once again infers no *a priori* distinction between the status of social actors. Riesebrodt recognises that with increasing division of labour comes a more organised and centralised form of religious organisation, which may then go on to monopolise the means of ‘salvation’. However, the authority that

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<sup>35</sup> Riesebrodt, ‘Religion’, p. 100.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., p. 104.

these organisations acquire is of a second order, as it is proceeds from the authority of superhuman powers not from the hierarchy or elite of the religious organisation. We shall return to the ontological status of divine or superhuman powers and how they operate in religious institutions in later chapters. However, also central to this picture of religious practice is the idea of communication between this world and the other. Language, and the linguistic resources of religious individuals and groups, is the primary means of bridging the ontological divide described above and of establishing all forms of human social institution.<sup>37</sup> This relationship between practice, language and institution will be explored in more detail below.

Another important concomitant of this definition of a religious institution is that religious practices can never be described as ‘unorganised’ as they are always governed by sets of rules, determining factors or conventions, once again pointing to the inadequacy of definitions of ‘folk religion’ that define it in distinction to ‘institutional’ or ‘organised’ religion. This understanding of the term ‘religious institution’ informed the title of this thesis and is central to the arguments presented below with regard to the functioning of religious agency and authority amongst the Gagauz.

Therefore, to sum up, this thesis, whilst recognising the methodological implications of accepting the shortcomings of a language that divides and excludes and accepting that changes in terminology may reflect ‘substantive shifts in our perceptions of human realities’<sup>38</sup>, seeks to explore other avenues of possibility for altering our perspective on ‘folk religion’. This approach builds on the ‘phenomenological’ tradition, recognising the valuable call to engage in the field with lived religion whilst also recognising that a ‘methodological priority for practice’ does much to overturn ‘value judgements implicit in distinctions between “higher and lower” forms of religion.’<sup>39</sup>

#### iv. The agency of humans, superhuman powers and language

Before I go on to introduce the key themes that form the core of the discussions on Gagauz religious practice and institutions, there is one more term that occurs throughout this study that should be clarified. In relation to human actors I use the term ‘agency’ to express the

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<sup>37</sup> Keane, ‘Religious Language’, p. 48.

<sup>38</sup> Primiano, ‘Vernacular Religion’, p. 38.

<sup>39</sup> Riesebrodt, ‘Religion’, p. 100.

combination of an individual's 'will or intention to act and the capability to carry this act through', which is determined by various 'enabling and constraining' structures in society.<sup>40</sup> We have briefly touched above on aspects of the two major 'schools' in the study of religion, the 'rationalist' sociological approach and the 'objectivist' phenomenological approach. Despite their differences, practitioners from these two disciplinary backgrounds have a shared understanding of scientific objectivity and both theoretical standpoints seek to offer 'explanations' of religious phenomena.<sup>41</sup> However, these two approaches have quite different and profound implications for the way we understand the agency of practitioners of religion. The sociological tradition, with its emphasis on structures and causal relations, can result in an understanding that effectively 'crushes' the individual agent's scope for free will and action, whereas, the phenomenological approach, which tends to make fewer assumptions about the operation of causal structures in religion and society, allows for more autonomy of social actors. Therefore, depending on our theoretical and methodological bias, the creativity and freedom of the social actor or the hegemony of the institutional order can tend to prevail in interpretations of religion and its workings.

Placing lay practices, conventionally seen as 'folk' or 'popular' in nature and beyond the bounds of 'solid' social institutions, within a discourse on the relationship between institutions and individual agency, I hope to draw a balance between these two approaches. The 'soft' field of 'folk religion', where the 'worldview' of the individual and the creative impulse of the 'commune' (rather than the institution) are the dominant paradigms, has been defined historically, as we have seen above, in relation to a more 'solid' concept of 'official' religion, where the constraining power of institutions is more readily appreciated. By approaching the 'institutionalising' behaviours and activities that take place between these two polarities, this study hopes to reflect the extent of human potential and the diversity of human agency within a 'context' that is understood in equal measure to be influenced and shaped by agency whilst also acting to limit and constrain agency.

In the light of Riesebrodt's description of religious practice and institutions we should also say a few words about the relationship between human agency and divine

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<sup>40</sup> G. Lindquist, *Conjuring Hope, Healing and Magic in Contemporary Russia*, Epistemologies of Healing Vol.1, New York-Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2006, p.7

<sup>41</sup> Flood, *Beyond Phenomenology*, p. 31.

agency. According to definitions of religion derived from the intellectualist approach of Frazer and Tylor, divine agency lies at the centre of traditional religion.

Traditional religion pre-eminently takes the form of a cosmology whose basic explanatory category is that of *agency*: its pantheon of gods and spirits, whose actions have consequences in the perceptible world, can be invoked to explain why this rather than that event occurred; and it affords a means by which men, through influencing the will of the gods, can themselves hope to influence the course of events.<sup>42</sup>

This description of the role of divine agents in religion appears to support Riesebrodt's assertion about the nature of religious practice. However, neither of these approaches suggests how human agents access supernatural powers and in turn how divine beings become active agents in human affairs. This problem, I suggest, can be best approached through the recognition of the role of language and signification.

Language has the power to constitute its subject and, as Judith Butler notes, naming something gives it the 'possibility for social existence, initiated into a temporal life of language'.<sup>43</sup> In terms of divine agents and how we access them in religious practice, we could use John Searle's words and describe them as 'language-dependent facts'.<sup>44</sup> That is to say, without language it is impossible to make assertions about the divine or for the divine to 'speak' to us; without language we cannot establish a religious reality in 'commune'. This does nothing to question the ontological status of superhuman powers but merely recognises that language and its symbolizing power are the primary vehicle by which divine powers appear and seem to operate in the world. In this sense language is also the vital 'bridging' component between divine powers and human actors and the means by which religious institutions are constituted and legitimated.

Language itself has been equated with agency or, as Butler puts it based on observations made by Toni Morrison, it is a 'performance with effects'.<sup>45</sup> The agency of language here should not be understood in precisely the same way that we understand the agency of the subject or the human agent.

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<sup>42</sup> J. Skorupski, *Symbol and Theory: A philosophical study of theories of religion in social anthropology*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976, p. 2.

<sup>43</sup> J. Butler, *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative*, New York and London: Routledge, 1997, p. 2.

<sup>44</sup> J. Searle, *The Construction of Social Reality*, London: Penguin, 1996, pp. 60-63.

<sup>45</sup> Butler, *Excitable Speech*, p. 7.

We do things with language, produce effects with language, and we do things to language, but language is also the thing that we do. Language is a name for our doing: both “what” we do (the name for the action that we characteristically perform) and that which we effect, the act and its consequences.<sup>46</sup>

Language, therefore, can also be divided from the body that is speaking and in this sense is possessed of a duality that allows for its agency to be ‘diffuse’ and transferable. The example cited by Keane of Augustine’s conversion to Christianity may help to illustrate this point. In this very simple example of how words and language can be divorced from the body that speaks, Augustine hears the voice of a child through a wall reciting ‘take and read, take and read’ and understands them to be the words of God.<sup>47</sup> It is this power of language to transfer its agency or its ‘doing’ from one context to another and from one speaker, writer or performer to other agents, be they human or divine, that enables divine agents to play a role in the establishment of religious institutional facts and human social life. This is done in a number of ways such as using a personal volition disclaimer (claiming a divine source for one’s words), using sacred words or secret languages, avoiding the use of the first and second person in speech, to name but a few.<sup>48</sup> Highlighting the agentive role of language in this way, alongside the agency of human actors, offers another conceptual route for understanding how religious practice bridges the ‘double cosmological register’ of the divine and human realms in the way suggested by Riesebrodt. In the chapters that follow in this thesis the ‘texts’ of Gagauz religious practice, the context of their production and reproduction, and the performance of ‘texts’, are approached in the light of this recognition of the primary role of language in religious practice and the institutionalisation of religious facts.

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid., p. 8.

<sup>47</sup> Keane, ‘Religious Language’, p. 49.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., p. 52.

## v. Text

Walter Ong's statement, 'The scholarly focus on texts had ideological consequences', not only holds true for his own field of linguistics but also for the study of religions.<sup>49</sup> The often assumed relationships of religious traditions to their 'texts', especially those termed scripture, is built into the fabric of the scholarly study of religious traditions. The analytical framework of the field is built on a heritage of theological and Western academic thought that is institutionally biased towards textual authority. This bias is also one of the fundamental pillars that underpin assumptions about the nature of 'folk' and 'official' religion. These assumptions about the primacy of textual authority are particularly strong in the case of Christian traditions. However, more recently this has been challenged by anthropologists such as Matthew Engelke, who has highlighted instead the performative nature of religious authority,<sup>50</sup> and Paul Gifford, who points to the fact that the authority of scripture, despite 'ensuring some experience of identity over time', is subject to complex contextual transfiguration (something we shall turn to shortly).<sup>51</sup>

In the early development of folklore studies, which inherited a way of viewing oral traditions as 'oral literature', the implication was that folkloric 'texts' pre-existed but had just not been written down yet. As Walter Ong points out, the term 'text' is used to refer not only to written texts but also to oral speech acts upon which, ultimately, all written texts rely in some way.<sup>52</sup> For the purposes of this study, 'text' is used to refer to both written and oral examples of human speech as the application of language in the context of religious practice. The 'texts' of religious practices that appear in this study are therefore representations of both episodes of speech and fixed 'text' objects, in the form of handwritten notebooks and the printed page.

As we shall see through the case studies presented in the chapters that follow, the 'texts' of religious practices are multi-aspectual. They have a history, in that they have been assigned a 'genre', and they have a 'function' (the two are often at odds in practice).

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<sup>49</sup> W. Ong, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word*, New York and London: Routledge, 2004, p. 8.

<sup>50</sup> See M. Engelke, 'Text and Performance in an African Church: The Book, "Live and Direct"', *American Ethnologist*, Vol 31, 1 (2004), pp. 76-91.

<sup>51</sup> P. Gifford, 'Religious Authority: Scripture, Tradition, Charisma', in J. Hinnels (ed.), *Routledge Companion to Religion*, London: Routledge, 2006, pp. 381-382.

<sup>52</sup> Ong, *Orality*, p. 13.



These two aspects of genre and function, which are central platforms to traditional scholarship on religious 'texts', are explored in later chapters. The 'texts' of religious practice also have a 'language'; in the case of this study 'texts' are voiced or appear in the Gagauz language, in Romanian, in Russian and in Church Slavonic. The significance of the language through which religious practice is performed again forms a central theme for the chapters that follow. If 'texts' are written, they also have a script; in the cultural milieu of Bessarabia the choice between Latin and Cyrillic script can be both a highly political and emotional one (see page 82). Written 'texts' also exist as artefacts which have been produced, and bear tangible witness to continuities and change. Finally, in addition to the communicative or semantic intent of 'texts', which has informed most traditional scholarship of religious texts, we will bring attention to the pragmatic effect of the performance of texts discussed below.

#### vi. Context

The speech acts and written texts of Gagauz religious practice offer a starting point from where the complex contexts that underpin and define them, not neatly defined by simple temporal and spatial boundaries, can be explored.<sup>53</sup> One of the primary aims of the 'methodological priority of practices' proposed above is to avoid the kind of decontextualisation of religion that results from traditional doctrinal, textual and *sui generis*, or essentialist, approaches. Giving sufficient emphasis to the complexity of 'context', not only historical and geographical but also linguistic, was one of the defining principles for this research project. The limited scale of the study was designed in order to be able to represent the social, economic, ethnic and linguistic context of the locality, in this case a small group of Gagauz villages (see page 39 and map 2 on page 17), in order to be able to appreciate the impact of these factors on religion and, conversely, also the way that religious practices, as an expression of the agentive forces outlined above, shape the cultural and social reality of the locality.<sup>54</sup> It is in this sense that this study works with and recognises the 'objective' dimension of the context.

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<sup>53</sup> Butler, *Excitable Speech*, p. 4.

<sup>54</sup> K. Knott, 'Issues in the Study of Religions and Locality', *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion*, 10 (1998), pp. 279-290.

As already discussed above, studies of religion 'as practised' require engagement with the object of study in their immediate context in the field. The 'location of action' is the 'context' that constrains and enables the agency of social actors described above. From this vantage point in the field, we can begin to approach an understanding of the dispositions, tendencies and inclinations, or in Bourdieuan terms the 'habitus', of religious actors and their resulting expressions of agency.<sup>55</sup> This 'situatedness' in the field, in turn, demands and 'imposes' a reflexive approach to our practice as students of religion.<sup>56</sup> We are forced to recognise the way that 'context' works to constrain or enable our own scope for agency in the social reality of the field and forces us into a dialogue with our object of study in a place where our social worlds meet.<sup>57</sup>

The focus on language described above, apart from offering an 'objective' means of approaching religious practice as an empirically observable phenomenon, also has the intention of recognising the 'dialogical and situated nature of enquiry' and its implications in terms of the subjectivity of 'religionist' research projects. In this way the recognition of 'context' is also the recognition of the relationship between agency and context in moulding social and institutional realities.

#### vii. Performance

The many 'performance' approaches taken to the study of religion and religious practice have been diverse and multifaceted. In the 1960s, the concept of performance was taken up by anthropologists and sociologists as a way of 'sidestepping the mind/body and thought/action dichotomies that previous approaches to ritual appeared to impose'.<sup>58</sup> Stanley Tambiah, in particular, took up the language of performance as a way of elevating 'action' from its devalued position relative to 'thought'.<sup>59</sup> This intent supports the basic methodological assumptions behind Riesebrodt's call for a 'priority for practices' in

<sup>55</sup> T. Rey, *Bourdieu on Religion: Imposing Faith and Legitimacy*, London and Oakville: Equinox, 2007, p. 47.

<sup>56</sup> M. Bowman, 'Response to Steven Sutcliffe', *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion*, 10 (1998), p. 278.

<sup>57</sup> Flood, *Beyond Phenomenology*, pp. 35-38.

<sup>58</sup> C. Bell, 'Performance', in M. Taylor (ed.), *Critical Terms for Religious Studies*, Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1998, p. 206.

<sup>59</sup> See in particular S. Tambiah, 'A Performative Approach to Ritual' in S. Tambiah (ed.) *Culture, Thought and Social Action: An Anthropological Perspective*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985.

relation to religious traditions. Recent studies of the last few decades mark a clear orientation towards the 'qualities of human action' and the 'language' of performance.<sup>60</sup>

A performative approach to ritual emerged in the late 1960's based on the development by John Austin of the theory of performative speech acts.<sup>61</sup> Performative speech acts are a category of verbal utterances that through their execution actually 'do' something; they do more than communicate information or describe a situation they actually effect or institute a new state of affairs. The example that is often cited is that of the priest's declaration during a marriage ceremony: 'I hereby pronounce you man and wife'. The effect of these words, when uttered by the priest in the right context, actually brings about the state that they proclaim.<sup>62</sup> In this sense language is seen as functional as opposed to descriptive and 'speech act theory draws attention to language as a human social practice' rather than a means of communicating information.<sup>63</sup>

Robbins, on the basis of observations made by Gardner, calls attention to the fact that much of the anthropological literature has concerned itself primarily with what Austin termed 'illocutionary' acts, of the kind cited above, that are considered to alter states of 'being', and overlooked another aspect of Austin's theory of speech acts that relates to 'perlocutionary effects'. The 'perlocutionary' aspect of speech acts is concerned with influencing others to do something by means such as persuading, inspiring or convincing and therefore relates more to indirect consequences of speech acts.<sup>64</sup> Both 'illocutionary' and 'perlocutionary' acts are commonly referred to as performative speech acts.

With regards to the linguistic study of speech acts John Searle, who developed Austin's theory further asserts:

There are, therefore, not two irreducibly distinct semantic studies, one a study of meanings of sentences and one a study of the performances of speech acts. For just as it is part of our notion of the meaning of a sentence that a literal utterance of that sentence with that meaning in a certain context would be the performance of a

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<sup>60</sup> Bell, 'Performance', p. 205.

<sup>61</sup> The foundational work of 'performative' linguistics is J. Austin's, *How to Do Things with Words*, London: Oxford University Press, 1962.

<sup>62</sup> Joel Robbins offers a brief summary of the performative approach to ritual in 'Ritual Communication and Linguistic Ideology: A reading and Partial Reformulation of Rappaport's Theory of Ritual', *Current Anthropology*, 42:5 (2001), pp. 593-594. For a fuller critique see D. Gardner, 'Performativity in Ritual: The Mianmin Case', *Man*, 18 (1983), pp. 346-60.

<sup>63</sup> V. Burr, *Social Constructionism*, London and New York, Routledge, 2005, p. 58.

<sup>64</sup> Robbins, 'Ritual Communication', p. 593.

particular speech act, so it is part of our notion of a speech act that there is a possible sentence (or sentences) the utterance of which in a certain context would in virtue of its (or their) meaning constitute a performance of that speech act.<sup>65</sup>

The implications of this understanding are that when studying the practice of ritual that includes 'texts', (and as we shall see all the religious ritual practices of the Gagauz incorporate the performance of words, whether they are a purely verbal utterance or a recitation of a written text) we have to establish an approach that combines both the propositional as well as the performative aspects of religious speech acts.

As we noted above in our discussions on agency, language plays a decisive part in bridging the ontological divide in religious practice and in the establishment of religious institutions. The role of 'performative' utterances in the creation of social realities has been described by John Searle and he has linked performative utterances directly to the creation of institutional facts. An important stage in his argument relates to the self-referentiality of social concepts. The example of a social concept he uses to illustrate his point is 'money'. If people recognise something, say a pound coin, as money, use it as money and treat it as money, then it is money. Conversely, if nobody thinks of it as money then it is not money. There is nothing inherent in the nature of a one pound coin that gives it the value it carries; language is the means by which money achieves its institutional status and language that maintains it. This principle can be expanded to a whole array of social concepts. This is important for us as it also applies to religious phenomena. A simple example that I shall refer to later in this thesis is the use of Holy Water in healing practices (see pages 174-175). Holy Water is Holy Water largely because people believe it to be so, or as Searle puts it: 'for social facts, the attitude we take toward the phenomenon is partly constitutive of the phenomenon'.<sup>66</sup> The establishment of this kind of institutional fact, that by its nature has to be recognised in society in order to function, is dependent on language. The symbolising power of language is partly constitutive of the fact that water can be recognised, used as, and treated as Holy Water.

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<sup>65</sup> J. Searle, *Speech Acts: An Essay on the Philosophy of Language*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980, pp. 17-18.

<sup>66</sup> Searle, *The Construction*, p. 33.

Social institutions, according to Searle, rely on language and the kind of performative illocutionary and perlocutionary speech acts outlined above.<sup>67</sup> As we shall establish in the chapters that follow, language plays an indispensable role in religious practice. The 'texts' of Gagauz practices are most often the primary, and also most accessible (for the researcher) dimension of religious practice. And what is more, social facts and institutional facts of the kind that Searle is referring to, although built on what Searle refers to as brute facts, do not need to be manifested in physical objects; they may just as well be 'sounds coming out of peoples' mouths or marks on paper - or even thoughts in their heads'.<sup>68</sup> The implications of this idea will become clearer from the examples of Gagauz lay institutions and performance that will be presented later. The principle therefore is that speech does not merely *reflect* the social and cultural realities of religious lives, it *enacts* them; it is the vehicle through which social and cosmological order is constituted, reinstated or instituted.<sup>69</sup>

Pierre Bourdieu has criticised Austin's speech act theory for divorcing the speech act from its social context, which, according to Bourdieu, gives the words their authority in the first place. The power of performative utterances to institute social facts, is, according to Bourdieu, just as dependent on the social reality of the institutional context within which they are performed as on the utterances themselves.<sup>70</sup> This presents us with a problem of circularity, for if performative speech acts require the authority invested in them by institutions in order for them to function, how can they also be responsible for the creation of institutional facts in the first place? The case studies and actual examples of religious practice that follow I hope will demonstrate how religious language can operate to circumvent this problem of circularity.

The key concepts of 'text', 'context' and 'performance' and their relationship to religious language outlined above, are central to the arguments presented in this thesis. They relate to how groups and individuals in the field of lay religious practice, considered by scholarship to be the domain 'folk religion', operate within and create institutional facts and structures in relation to the institutional facts and structures of Church Orthodoxy and nationalist political discourse.

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid., pp. 54-55.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., p. 35.

<sup>69</sup> Butler, *Excitable Speech*, p. 18.

<sup>70</sup> P. Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 1994, p. 109.

viii. On being in the field

The centrality of these three themes to this research project emerged during periods of fieldwork in the Republic of Moldova. Altogether I spent 12 months in *Gagauziya* engaged in fieldwork. The longest stay was from September 2005 to July 2006 with shorter trips in 2004 and 2007. Most of my time was spent based in the regional capital of the Gagauz Autonomous Region, *Komrat* (Comrat), from where I made excursions to neighbouring villages. I would usually stay 3-4 days at a time in the villages of *Avdarma* (Avdarma), *Tomay* (Tomai) and *Kazayak* (Cazaclia), all also within the autonomous region or UTAG. I made shorter and less frequent trips to the villages of *Beşalma* (Beşalma, UTAG), *Kurçu* (Vinogradovka, Ukraine), *Küçük Baurçi* (Baurci, Căuşeni district), *Baurçu* (Baurci, UTAG), *Beşgöz* (Beşghioz, UTAG) and *Gaydar* (Gaidar, UTAG). These villages (with the exception of *Kurçu* and *Küçük Baurçi*) are all within 30-40 minutes travel by bus from *Komrat* (see map 2, page 14) and are communities with close ties to the regional centre and each other.

In the chapters that follow, the circumstances and context of many of the meetings I had with Gagauz people are made explicit. Generally speaking, observations of practice, interviews and discussions took place in family homes and my informants were gathered through family and neighbourhood networks. Most of my informants were happy to be referred to by name; where this is not the case I have indicated when a pseudonym has been used. Some informants, especially members of the priesthood, requested to remain anonymous; in other instances I took the decision, due to the delicate nature of the conversation, not to cite my informant by name. Some topics I approached in my research are contentious in the local Church community and therefore the anonymity of the informant was maintained to avoid uncomfortable or damaging relationships arising with and between members of the local clergy.

Many of my informants had encountered or been interviewed by ethnographers or folklorists at some point before. To be interviewed about traditions and to be photographed whilst performing folk customs, for some, was a very familiar experience. In this sense, the role I preformed as a researcher and the role my informants played as 'culture keeper' were seemingly clear and determined by past experience. What was highly unusual was the fact that I spoke little Russian (most researchers in the Gagauz region have been until very

recently Soviet scholars and therefore fluent Russian speakers) and would communicate by choice with my informants in the local Gagauz idiom. In the early months, before my knowledge of Gagauz was sufficient to converse freely, I worked together with local friends and acquaintances who spoke some English.

Finally, as Bell rightly points out, the 'performance' approach broadly taken in this thesis unavoidably demands of the scholar an engagement with 'post-modernist concerns'.<sup>71</sup> The acute sense of self-consciousness that occurs at those moments in the field, such as when the priest interrupts his 'performance' of the liturgy to chastise his flock for the bad impression their chatter in church is creating on the 'English man', or when the healer alters the words of her charm to make them more 'Turkish' so that 'the foreigner' can understand, requires not only reflexivity from the scholar but demonstrates how, by his presence, he instigates a process of self-conscious reflection on the part of the performer in relation to their practice/tradition. In this way events can 'pull the observer into an active role in the phenomena' and demand that we engage with the liminality of situations. Far from being something to avoid, this process can help create an awareness on the part of the researcher of the emergent nature of tradition in changing temporal and spatial contexts.

Because of the nature and focus of this thesis, the unmediated, the covert, the everyday, the ordinary, the chance meeting and the overheard remark all contributed to the picture of Gagauz lay religious practice that emerges. A study of this kind, one that does not centre on either the core practices of Church Orthodoxy or aspects of religion that involve mass participation, may fall open to the criticism of, as Eamon Duffy puts it, 'focusing disproportionately on the *outré*'.<sup>72</sup> The topics covered may indeed seem to elevate aspects of religious practice and observance that appear decidedly heterodox or peripheral. However, these elements have been approached as lay institutions in relationship to the narratives, structures and major paradigms of Orthodox Christianity as an institutional system. Through uncovering the hidden 'reverse' of some of the most central constructs of Orthodox worship and practice, I seek to demonstrate that the power to attach labels to things that are deemed by certain authorities to be 'beyond the pale' is ultimately due to the fact that they are in fact 'interior' to the phenomena, and therefore

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<sup>71</sup> Bell, 'Performance', pp. 210-211.

<sup>72</sup> E. Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England 1400-1580*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2002, p. xix.

also potentially subversive, rather than exterior to it. The rationale behind this way of thinking will I hope become clear as this thesis progresses. Ultimately, the data presented here come down to a set of decisions taken in relation to my initial research question. My focus from the outset was what people actually do in their religious lives, how that comes about and how others choose to represent it. Therefore it is important to acknowledge the limited scope of this research question and draw attention towards the limitations that time, as well as other factors, imposed on this project, which means that ultimately I must leave much unsaid that could be said about the religious lives and practices of the Gagauz of Bessarabia.

#### ix. Chapterisation

The first two chapters of this thesis are designed to give the context of the macro-discourse on the Gagauz and their religion and an overview on the historical political and religious narrative that unfolded in the last 200 years of Gagauz history. Both chapter one and two give an insight into the role of national political, clerical and scholarly 'actors' in the historical construction of Gagauz religious identity and popular consciousness. Chapter two centres on the recent history of the Orthodox Church and developments in religious practice, especially the introduction of the Gagauz language to religious life. These chapters serve as a backdrop to the chapters that follow, which move from macro-level discourse to a micro practice-based approach to Gagauz 'folk' religion.

Chapter three, in contrast to chapter two, shifts emphasis from clerical agency to the role of lay translators and copyists in the introduction of the Gagauz idiom into religious life. This chapter explores the significance of non-canonical texts in Gagauz religious practices and introduces one of the central platforms of the thesis; namely the centrality of Gagauz language 'texts' in the generation of authority and the establishment of lay institutions.

Chapters four and five are concerned with healing practice and as such deal primarily with oral rather than written culture. The healing 'texts' and healing practices of the Gagauz are explored in relation to the classificatory paradigm of 'magic vs. religion'. Chapter four centres on the context within which healing takes place, the broader healing system and the biographies of village healers. Chapter five then moves on to examine the



centrality of the 'texts' of healing practices and highlights the role played by the words of divine agents revealed directly to healers and through healing practices and how, through performance, these operate to establish and maintain the legitimacy of the institution of healing in the community.

Chapter six introduces the practice of prayer within an Orthodox context and moves on to explore the role of public 'toast-prayers' in the maintenance of social and cosmological relations. Finally, chapter seven introduces 'archaic prayer' and explores the construction of this genre in bipolar terms between canon and apocrypha and 'folk' and 'official' religion before moving on to focus on the transmission and performance of prayer and the significance of the Gagauz idiom as the medium for the establishment of lay institutions.

## *Chapter 1.*

### Historical Narrative and the Discourse on Origins: Constructing Gagauz Ethnic and Religious Identity.

The purpose of this chapter is two-fold. Firstly, I wish to present here a brief overview of Gagauz history from the time of the migration to Bessarabia, roughly starting with the Russian-Turkish war of 1768-1774 up to the end of the Second World War in order to set the context for the chapters that follow. By necessity, this sketch of history must be highly selective and we shall restrict ourselves to the major social, economic and political developments that impacted on the Gagauz settlements of southern Bessarabia, a region known as the Budjak steppe that today is divided between the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine (see map 1, page 16). This period was characterised by a series of dislocations or separations. These were initially spatial, beginning with the obvious geographical dislocation of the migration from the eastern Balkans, but there were also social, economic and administrative dislocations that resulted from the frequent oscillations of the national borders and the creation and dissolution of the state entities that accompanied them. The legacy of these frequent ruptures can be felt in the fabric of contemporary Gagauz society and they set the context for some of the key themes relating to language, identity and religious practice that will be discussed in later chapters.

The perpetual political, economic and social flux that surrounded Gagauz communal life is mirrored by the ambiguity and contested nature of the discourse on origins, ethnogenesis and race that came to dominate Gagauz historiography and ethnographies dealing with the Gagauz. The pronouncements of scholars, it will be argued, have been instrumental in constructing a form of ethno-religious identity for the Gagauz that utilizes and mythologizes historical narratives in order to align, or avoid the alignment of, the Gagauz people with one or other of the nation states in the region. The second section of this chapter therefore will provide an overview of the main national narratives that have defined this discourse and examine how these are directly related to the discourse on Gagauz religion and religiosity. As the historian Paul Wittek pointed out 'It is the

religion of the Gagauz that makes them such an intriguing historical problem'<sup>73</sup> and it is to this central defining feature of Gagauz identity, their Orthodox Christianity, of course in combination with their Turkish language, that all theories on their origins and ethnogenesis ultimately return.

The theme of religion, which has run through both the discourse on origins and the historical narrative since the migration, is also at the root of conceptions of Gagauz nationhood. It is no surprise that amongst the Gagauz the first clear expressions of ethnic consciousness and the search for a collective identity originate with a member of the clergy. The Gagauz national awakening, as we shall see in later chapters, was initiated with both a national and a religious motivation, and its eventual culmination in the creation of a Gagauz polity in 1995 is indirectly the result of earlier aspirations in the religious sphere as well as later explicitly national or ethnic political endeavors. As well as inspiring and helping to shape this national awakening the religious dimension of the historical discourse has also helped shape contemporary Gagauz religious practice. It is the aim of this chapter therefore to make explicit the link between the historical narratives and discourses on the Gagauz that have gone before with the themes in contemporary Gagauz religious practice that will be explored in the chapters that follow in this thesis.

### 1.1. Migration and Dislocation

The Gagauz of Bessarabia arrived in their present home from various locations in the eastern Balkans via different routes and under varied circumstances. They were part of a general drift of the Orthodox Christian populations northwards out of Bulgaria, Greece and Serbia towards southern Russia that started in the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. This mass migration was precipitated by economic hardship and social instability under the Ottomans and by the disruptions of the successive wars between Russia and the Ottoman Empire during the course of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries.<sup>74</sup> The movement of populations in this period created a new multi-ethnic Bessarabia whose future came to be determined by its ethnically diverse character and the two-hundred-year struggle that ensued between

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<sup>73</sup> P. Wittek, 'Yazijioghlu' Ali on the Christian Turks of the Dobruja', *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, Vol. XIV, no. 3 (1952), p. 639.

<sup>74</sup> The Russo-Turkish wars of 1768-74, 1787-91 and 1806-12 in particular resulted in large population movements.

Russia and Romania over the territory. The Gagauz are just one small component in a wider complex national, political and religious conflict that has not only defined, and perhaps created, Gagauz nationhood but also Moldovan nationality and statehood.

From the late 18<sup>th</sup> to the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century the majority of the Gagauz population migrated from the eastern Balkans, especially from the districts of Varna and Kavarna in Dobrudja, the region of Deliorman, and to a lesser extent from Thrace and Macedonia, and headed north over the Danube, firstly into the principalities of Wallachia and Moldavia. Finally, after 1806 and again in greater numbers after 1812, they began settling on the Budjak steppe in southern Bessarabia, leaving much-diminished Gagauz communities in what is today North-Eastern Bulgaria and northern Greece.<sup>75</sup>

The period of the migration from the Balkan Peninsula presents a number of problems for the researcher of Gagauz history, possibly the most complex of which relates to their ethnic classification. As mentioned earlier, in official statistics the Gagauz were designated as a separate ethnic or ethno-national group only from the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century on and prior to this they are recorded as ethnically Bulgarian by Russian authorities.<sup>76</sup> However, what is clear from the sources is that Gagauz were amongst some of the earliest colonists to arrive in the Budjak, some possibly as early as 1768-1774 Russian-Turkish War, and that successive waves continued to arrive well into the 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>77</sup> The Gagauz villages of Bessarabia are therefore the result of various waves of migration of Gagauz people who originate from different regions of the eastern Balkans. Elements of these populations settled in the Budjak directly from Bulgaria, others sojourned for periods of up to a couple of decades on either bank of the Prut river on the land of Moldavian *boyars*, or landed aristocracy, before being settled as colonists on territory made vacant by the eviction of the Nogay Tartars at the hands of the Russian Imperial army after 1806.

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<sup>75</sup> Estimates place the current Gagauz population of Bulgaria and Greece somewhere in the region of 20,000 to 30,000 in each of the two countries.

<sup>76</sup> Radova, O., 'Ethnic Identification of Transdanubian Migrants and the gagauz Settling in the Budjak (The Late 18<sup>th</sup> – Early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries)', *Eurasian Studies*, 13 (1998), p. 54.

<sup>77</sup> Statistics presented by Radova, *ibid.*, p. 60-64, demonstrate that Gagauz settled in the same villages in successive waves during both the 1787-91 and the 1806-12 Russo-Turkish Wars. The Romanian historian Arbore also presents data from a census of the Bulgarian population of the Budjak from 1811 that indicate that some Gagauz villages were already settled prior to the 1812 annexation by Russia. See A. Arbore, Al. P., *Informații etnografice și mișcări de populație în Basarabia sudică și Dobrogea în veacurile XVIII și XIX cu specială privire la coloniile bulgărești din aceste regiuni*, Cernăuți: Institutul de Arte Grafice și Editură 'Glasul Bucovinei', 1929, p. 13.

With the close of the 1806-12 Russo-Turkish War, Russia secured the territory of Bessarabia from the Ottomans. Initially the region was granted an autonomous status and was governed according to special laws based on the traditional legal system of the Moldavian Principality. The early years of Russian rule were marred by poor government and administration, which is often portrayed as the result of mismanagement and greed on the part of the local Moldavian nobility. Indeed, in 1813 the situation was so dire that the Russian authorities had to take steps to prevent the peasantry from fleeing abuse at the hands of the *boyars* over the Prut to the Romanian principalities.<sup>78</sup> However, the indigenous legal system that characterised Bessarabian autonomy was gradually eroded over the following decades as Russia began to assert her authority over the territories. Bessarabia lost her special administrative status in 1828 and was finally made a standard *guberniya* or province in 1871.<sup>79</sup> In the southern region of Bessarabia, known as the Budjak Steppe, which was the area settled by the majority of the Balkan colonists, a special administration was established to govern the new colonial settlements. Special privileges, preferential tax concessions and larger grants of land were conferred on the Germans, Bulgarians, Gagauz and Ukrainians that settled this sparsely populated land. These special colonial arrangements lasted from 1816 until 1872.

The turbulence of this period of war and migration was followed by a period of relative calm and stability, which for the farmers that were settled on the colonial territories were relatively prosperous times. In the 1840s the first schools were founded in the region; in Southern Bessarabia a total of 21 schools were opened in the colonial settlements.<sup>80</sup> The Gagauz Orthodox priest Mihail Çakir, about whom we shall speak at some length shortly, regarded the period of the colonial administration as something of a Golden Age for the Gagauz, especially in moral and spiritual terms. The contribution of this period is central to his portrayal of the formation a unique Gagauz religious identity.<sup>81</sup> The religious character of the wars had the effect on the Gagauz, according to Çakir, of

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<sup>78</sup> G. Jewsbury, *The Russian Annexation of Bessarabia: 1774-1828*, New York and Guildford: East European Quarterly, 1976, p. 87.

<sup>79</sup> W. van Meurs, *The Bessarabian Question in Communist Historiography*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1994, p. 47.

<sup>80</sup> L. Marin, 'Dünkü hem Bütüncü Beşalma', in S. Kuroglo (ed.), *Etnogenez i Etnicheskaya Istoriya Gagauzov*, Kishinev: Ekim Basımı, 2002, p.187.

<sup>81</sup> M. Ciachir, 'Moralitatea Găgăuzilor din Basarabia', *Viața Basarabiei*, 2 (1935), p. 106.

'amplifying' even further the religious zeal that was to be found amongst the Russians.<sup>82</sup> The Russian colonial authorities, the generals, officers and administrators, sponsored and organised religious life in the new colonies and set an example for the settlers of strict religious and moral standards. Çakir also claims that the colonial administrator, Mihail Grigorievichi Butcov, would often send Gagauz colonists to visit the German settlements, which had been established with the express hope of stimulating economic and agricultural development, in order that they might see the 'order and discipline' there and learn some of their skills at working with the land, with grapevines and other crafts.<sup>83</sup>

This period of the colonial administration was interrupted by yet another war that was to cause the first territorial dislocation of the Gagauz of Bessarabia since the 1812 annexation. The Crimean War ended Russian domination in the Danubian Principalities and resulted in the three most southerly *raions* of Bessarabia, Cahul, Ismail and Bolgrad, being ceded to the Principality of Moldavia.<sup>84</sup> These three districts included a significant proportion of the Gagauz colonists. Between 1856 and 1878 the Moldovian government and then the Romanian government attempted to boost the ethnic Romanian presence on this territory and a large number of Ukrainians and Russians, and also a number of Gagauz and Bulgarians, departed for Russian territories further east.<sup>85</sup> At the same time Romanian schools were opened and the Orthodox Church was brought back under the authority of the Romanian Church. These years saw the formation of the Romanian nation state with the unification under one *hospodar*, or princely ruler, of Moldavia and Wallachia. The many Gagauz colonists, along with their Bulgarian, German and Ukrainian neighbours, therefore, had, in a period of a few short decades, lived under first Moldavian and then Russian and finally Romanian administrations during which time they had experienced the formation of the Romanian nation state and been subject to periods of Russification and Romanianization in education and Slavization and then Romanianization of Church and liturgy. It is debatable how directly these vicissitudes affected the deeply rural and peripheral Gagauz communities. However, this cycle was to repeat itself several times

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<sup>82</sup> M. Chiachir, 'Religiositatea găgăuzilor', *Viața Basarabiei*, 3 (1934), p. 25.

<sup>83</sup> See Chiachir, 'Moralitatea', p. 105. On the motivation for and the establishment of the German settlements in Bessarabia see G. Jewsbury, *The Russian Annexation of Bessarabia: 1774-1828*, East European Quarterly, Columbia University Press: New York and Guildford, 1976, pp. 70-71.

<sup>84</sup> van Meurs, *The Bessarabian Question*, p. 49.

<sup>85</sup> C. King, *The Moldovans: Romania, Russia, and the Politics of Culture*, Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 2000, p. 22.

before the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In more recent times the impact these economic, political and social dislocations had on the lives of Gagauz can be more clearly read, especially in the religious sphere.

Meanwhile, on the Russian side of the new border created in 1856, the loss of territory to Moldavia in the Crimean War and the decline in influence on the newly formed Romanian state heralded in a new period of Russification of Bessarabian society. The civil authorities ceased all provision of education in the Romanian language in 1867 and from 1871 a policy of Russification of the Church, which we shall speak about in more detail in chapter two, was pursued enthusiastically by the new Archbishop Pavel Lebedev.<sup>86</sup> When the southern territories were returned to Russia following the Russian-Turkish War of 1877-78 Romanian priests were given an ultimatum to learn Russian within two years or leave Bessarabia.<sup>87</sup>

In the decades after the colonisation, despite the poor quality of the steppe-land, the generous allocations of land to the colonists were sufficient to support the imported population. However, within two generations, that is by the 1870s and 80s, the land was incapable of sustaining the growing population.<sup>88</sup> At this point Gagauz farmers began to look for new means of supplementing their income and large tracts of land were planted with grapevines. As we shall see in chapter four, wine and viticulture came to play an important role in Gagauz economic and social life, which in turn has helped shape aspects of Gagauz religiosity.

In the 1897 census data for Bessarabia, the first we have that distinguishes the Gagauz from Bulgarians, we can see that the introduction of Russian schools had not had a vast impact on Gagauz society as literacy rates still stood at 21% for men and less than 2% for women. These high levels of illiteracy placed the Gagauz alongside the other traditionally 'backward' rural elements of the population, the Moldovians, Ukrainians and Gypsies.<sup>89</sup> At the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century none of these nationalities enjoyed schools that

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<sup>86</sup> King, *The Moldovans*, p. 25.

<sup>87</sup> C. Upson Clark, *Bessarabia: Russia and Roumania on the Black Sea*, New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1927, p. 104.

<sup>88</sup> S. Novakov, 'Razvitie sel'skokhozyaystvennogo proizvodstva, remestel, promislov i rinka v poseleniyakh Gagauzov i Bolgar posle reform 70-x godov XIX v.' in S. Bulgar (ed.), *Istoriya i Kultura Gagauz-ov*, Komrat-Kishinev: Pontus, 2006, p. 209.

<sup>89</sup> Indeed, the least literate next to Gypsies were in fact the Moldavians who were 6.1% literate against an average of 15.6% for the population as a whole. See I. Livezeanu, *Cultural Politics in Greater Romania*, Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, p. 94.

taught their mother tongue.<sup>90</sup> The low literacy rates may also partly account for the high level of retention of the mother tongue, which has continued until the present day. The 1989 census reported that 91.2% of Gagauz regarded the Gagauz language as their mother tongue and in 2002 this figure had risen to 92.3%. However, the statistics recorded under the heading 'language usually spoken', which stood at 69.4%, may be a more reliable indication of the strength of the Gagauz language.<sup>91</sup> It is still possible to come across elderly Gagauz, women especially, that can speak neither Russian nor Romanian confidently.

The Gagauz idiom was not officially codified until 1957 when the Moldovan Politburo introduced a Cyrillic alphabet for use in education. Previous moves had been made, primarily in the interwar years in the Church sphere, to devise a literary form of the idiom and we shall look at this in some detail in chapter two. However, most Gagauz literary historians regard 1957 as the year of the birth of Gagauz literature and the literary idiom.<sup>92</sup> In the same year the Gagauz language was introduced into the state education programme but this experiment was brought to a swift end in the early 1960s.<sup>93</sup> There was also a brief flourish of publishing activity in the Gagauz idiom in the following decades but the Gagauz idiom played only a very a minimal role in public and official cultural life and Russian remained the sole language of instruction in schools until perestroika when the issue of Gagauz linguistic and cultural rights reappeared with the formation of *Gagauz Halkı*, 'The Gagauz People', initially a cultural club that in the late 1980s became the main vehicle for the political ambitions of the Gagauz.

The twentieth century, much like the 19<sup>th</sup>, was characterised by territorial disputes and ideological battles between Russia (and her successor state the Soviet Union) and Romania, which resulted in frequent border and regime changes. Despite their peripheral location the Gagauz did not remain oblivious of the political currents that swept the Russian Empire at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In the wake of the first Russian Revolution in 1905 a short-lived republic was formed in Southern Bessarabia centred in

<sup>90</sup> G. Murgoci, *La Population de la Bessarabie: Études Démographique*, Paris, 1920, p. 54.

<sup>91</sup> Biroul Național de Statistică al Republicii Moldova, Recensămîntul 2004 - Populația după naționalitățile de bază, limba maternă și limba în care vorbește de obicei.

Available at: [www.statistica.md/recensamint.php?lang=ro](http://www.statistica.md/recensamint.php?lang=ro) [accessed on 20 June 2008]

<sup>92</sup> L. Baurçulu, 'İstoriya Tematikası Gagauz Literaturasında', in S. Kuroglo (ed.), *Etnogenez i Etnicheskaya İstoriya Gagauzov*, Kishinev: Ekin Basimi, 2002, p. 142.

<sup>93</sup> King, *The Moldovans*, p. 211.



the Gagauz town of *Komrat*. The so-called *Komrat* Republic, the result of a peasant rising of the kind seen all over Russia at that time, lasted a mere 15 days. Today, Gagauz historians consider this the first expression of Gagauz statehood on the territory of Moldavia, giving them a valuable precedent for the creation of the Gagauz Autonomous Region on the 23<sup>rd</sup> December 1994.<sup>94</sup> However, unlike some of the other political movements and actions of the time amongst ethnic Moldovan elites in Bessarabia, which were explicitly nationalist in flavour, demanding things such as the use of the Moldovan language in schools and courts, the *Komrat* rising centred on land reform and the call for social justice and there is no evidence to suggest it had an national dimension.

The First World War and the revolution of 1917 were to bring far more wide ranging and longer lasting changes. The Moldovan movement spearheaded by the Moldovan National Party, moved from calls for cultural and political rights within the Russian Federation and autocephaly for the Bessarabian Church to calls for full independence.<sup>95</sup> In October 1917 a National Council was formed, the *Sfatul Țării*, which in December of that year declared Bessarabia an autonomous republic within Russia. Occupation by Romanian troops soon followed and in the face of threats from Bolshevism and an expansionist Ukraine the *Sfatul Țării* voted in favour of union with Romania. However, delegates representing the peasants, mistrusting the intentions of the Moldavian *boyars* with regards to land reform, and the minority peoples, largely settlers loyal to Russia and suspicious of Romania and her nationalist policies, voted against the union.

The incorporation into the new Greater Romanian state, which was recognised by the Treaty of Trianon in 1920, brought immediate and quite dramatic changes. Romania embarked on a nation building project in an attempt to forge a unitary state from diverse regions characterised by their ethnic, cultural and linguistic diversity. Bessarabia, because of its multi-ethnic character, was considered a problem region in terms of national integration. Much of the population was hostile to the union with Romania and from reports coming out of the southern provinces it seems that the Romanian occupying forces only exacerbated the situation with their harsh punitive treatment of the local population.<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> N. Tufar, '1906-cı Yılı'nın Komrat Respublikası – Gagauz Halkının Millet-Serbestlik Akıntısının bir Etapı', *Sabaa Yıldızı*, 23 (2003), p. 24.

<sup>95</sup> King, *The Moldovans*, pp. 30-31.

<sup>96</sup> Livezeanu cites a number of French sources that illustrate this point. See Livezeanu, *Cultural Politics*, pp. 98-99.

Reports from Gagauz villages of executions and floggings for failing to pay taxes or hand over requisitioned wheat, and imprisonment for public servants 'refusing to recognise the Romanian Motherland' reached the table at the Paris peace negotiations.<sup>97</sup>

Resistance to Romanian rule in Bessarabia persisted well into the 1920s with the aid of Russian agitation from across the border in Soviet Ukraine. The Soviets hoped for a socialist revolution in Romania and Bessarabia in particular had a significant Slavic and Jewish population that had been active in the revolutionary movement. Added to this was significant discontent with the half-hearted land reforms that failed to bring real benefits to the mass of the peasantry. Three uprisings took place in the first decade after the war the most famous of which was the Tatar Bunar revolt of 1924. Supported by communists from Soviet Ukraine, the rising, centred in an area of the Budjak populated by a mixture of Ukrainians, Russians, Bulgarians and Moldovans, lasted several weeks and resulted in the declaration of the short-lived Bessarabian Soviet Republic.<sup>98</sup> Such revolutionary activities added to Romanian mistrust of her new minorities and also made the threat of Bolshevism seem very real to the Orthodox Church in the region, which was beginning to feel the effect of anti-religious propaganda from the Soviet Union. This threat from communism was another crucial factor in the development of Gagauz religiosity and was a significant element in the 'national message' that was being disseminated to the Gagauz by Mihail Çakir that we shall explore in chapter two.

This interwar period is particularly significant when considering the development of Gagauz national consciousness. The experience of the intense state-sponsored nationalism of the Romanian authorities, the result of a project to unite all ethnic Romanians under one polity, could not help but draw attention to otherness. The ethnic differential became important in the Balkans and South Eastern Europe only with the rise of nationalism and nation building projects. This had impacted on the Gagauz communities that remained in the Balkans from an earlier date. From the 1860s the struggle between the emergent Bulgarian state and breakaway Bulgarian Exarchate and the Greek-led clergy of Constantinople under the Ecumenical Patriarch resulted in an intense struggle for the loyalty of the Gagauz of the Varna region.<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>97</sup> *The Romanian Occupation in Bessarabia: Documents*, Lahure: Paris, pp. 178-79.

<sup>98</sup> van Meurs, *The Bessarabian Question*, pp. 74-77.

<sup>99</sup> On the position of the Gagauz in this confrontation between the Greek and Bulgarian Churches see S. Ashley, 'Minority Populations and the Nationalist Process in the Bulgarian Lands (1821-1876), in L. Collins

In the steppe lands of southern Bessarabia and Ukraine the Bolshevik revolution and the Romanian and Ukrainian national projects precipitated the same need to instrumentalize ethnic difference. The same southern Bessarabian representatives that were reporting to the Paris peace negotiations on the injustices suffered by the Bessarabian population at the hands of the Romanian army described Bessarabia before their arrival in the following terms.

The whole population inhabiting Bessarabia under the beneficent influence of Russia consisted of one sole people – the Russians. There existed neither Bulgarians, nor Moldavians, nor Gagauzes. All declared themselves with pride to be Russian. Such was Bessarabia, a land of smiling beauty, of corn and wine, prior to the arrival of the Romanians.<sup>100</sup>

By the 1930s, following twenty years of Romanian rule, it was clear that one could no longer speak of an ethnically undefined or ambiguous populace in the province. As we shall see below the Gagauz came out of this period with a history, a fledgling literature and an ethno-national identity defined by race, religion and language. These went on to become the main building blocks in the construction of a Gagauz national identity that was propagated in the Soviet era.

The two main instruments the Romanian authorities had at their disposal to pursue their national project amongst the populace at large were the schools and the Romanian Orthodox Church. We shall look in some length at the role the Church played in this period in the following chapter but in the sphere of education the changes were immediate and comprehensive. Romanian schoolteachers were dispatched from ethnically Romanian regions to every school in the southern districts of Bessarabia.<sup>101</sup> Officially the Romanianization of the school system was achieved by the early 1920s.<sup>102</sup> However, the success of the project in its broader aim to undermine the position of the Russian language as the language of administration and public life and eventually replace it with Romanian

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(ed.), *Anglo-Bulgarian Symposium Proceedings, Volume 1*, London: School of Slavonic and East European Studies, 1985, pp. 54-55, A. Manov, A., *Gagauzlar (Hristiyan Türkler)*, Ankara: Türk Tarihi Kurumu Başimevi, 2001, p. 28 and p. 64, and R. J. Crampton, 'The Turks in Bulgaria, 1878-1944', *International Journal of Turkish Studies*, no. 4, vol. 2 (1989), p. 67.

<sup>100</sup> *The Romanian Occupation*, p. 179.

<sup>101</sup> Arhivă Națională București, Presedinția Consiliului de Miniștri (PCM), Ministerul Cultelor și Instr. Publice, 1919. Inventar 2552, Fond 254/1919, pp. 1-2.

<sup>102</sup> Livezeanu, *Cultural Politics*, pp. 116-117.

was less easily achieved. Russian continued to be used as a lingua franca, especially in the southern districts, throughout the 1920s and 30s. In Gagauz villages the Romanian schools are remembered as being strict but efficient. Many older Gagauz informants demonstrably acquired a good command of Romanian in this period thanks to the zeal of their Romanian teachers.

In this brief survey we have covered just over one hundred years of Gagauz history in Bessarabia up to the formation of Greater Romania. These historical circumstances resulted in a series of dislocations from territory, from state entities, from Church institutions and from cultural and linguistic influences, all of which have contributed to a feeling of discontinuity with the 'historic' past that was expressed by many Gagauz I spoke to whilst living in *Gagauziya*. These historical themes, which recur again and again throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century, will be taken up in the chapters that follow. However, from the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and reaching a climax in the 1930s and 40s, the national discourse that dominated Romanian public life was part of a broader movement across the region that centred on defining the nation through race, language and territory. The Gagauz of Bessarabia, located as they were between competing nation states and national discourses, were caught up in intense territorial and ideological disputes between Romania, Bulgaria, Russia and Turkey. The literature on Gagauz origins, ethnogenesis and race proliferated in these countries during this period and elements of this discourse were incorporated in the creation of the first 'home-grown' narrative of Gagauz origins that emerged in the 1930s, opening the way for these themes to enter the popular consciousness of the Gagauz themselves.

## 1.2. The Discourse on Origins, Ethno-genesis and Race

As already mentioned, the overwhelming majority of the literature dealing with the Gagauz is concerned with the problem of their ethno-genesis. The historical period during which this process is judged to have taken place potentially spans from Turkic pre-history in Mongolia and Central Asia through to the early modern period in the Balkans. This study is not concerned directly with the issues and concerns that have consumed countless Turkish, Bulgarian, Russian, Polish, Czech and Romanian historians, ethnographers and linguists. Many of these scholars, especially those writing in the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup>

century, were motivated by the more or less general concern of the emergent Balkan and East European nations to determine and secure the borders of the nation, both geographically and ethnically. However, the discourse that resulted from these efforts to determine and authenticate the ethnic origins of the Gagauz has had a considerable influence on contemporary political discourse and relations between the Moldovan State, the Gagauz Autonomous Region, Turkey and Russia. In turn, this discourse and the issues of identity, language and nationality that are the product of the interwar ideological nation-building projects and post-World War II nationalities discourse of the Soviet era, have had an influence on the modes of contemporary religious practice amongst the Gagauz. In other words, the historical discourse on origins, the political discourse on nationhood and self-determination and the patterns of religious practice are intimately bound together.

The beginnings of the academic discourse on origins can be marked by the publication in 1889 of an article by the Czech historian Constantin Jiricek in which he proposed that the Gagauz were the descendents of Cuman or Kipchak tribes, who during the Middle Ages, crossed the Danube and settled in the Balkans.<sup>103</sup> Another hypothesis popular amongst Bulgarian scholars supposes that the origins of the Gagauz can be found amongst the Proto-Bulgars. This idea also originates with a Czech scholar, Škorpil, and advances the notion that a portion of the original Bulgar tribes that had crossed the Danube in the 7th century and settled in the region avoided the Slavisation which had been the fate of the rest of the Bulgar nation, but nevertheless underwent conversion to Orthodoxy together with their ethnic kin.<sup>104</sup> The main proponents of this theory were Gavril Zanetov,<sup>105</sup> in the early years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and later in the 1940s, Peter Mutaftchiev.<sup>106</sup> Contemporary Bulgarian scholarship continues to support this view despite the lack of any convincing historical or linguistic evidence to support it.<sup>107</sup>

At the same time that Bulgarian and Czech scholars began to take interest in the Gagauz, Russian researchers introduced a new strand of thought. The Russian army

<sup>103</sup> C. Jiricek, 'Einige Bemerkungen über die Überreste der Petschenegen und Kumanen sowie über die Völkerschaften der sogenannten Gagauzi und Surguci im heutigen Bulgarien', *Böhmischen Gesellschaft der Wissenschaften*, Phil. Hist., Klasse 1889, 1890, pp. 3-30. See also C. Jiricek, *Das Fürstenthum Bulgarien*, Prague-Vienna-Leipzig, 1891.

<sup>104</sup> K. Škorpil, 'Materiali kám váprosa za 'sádbata na Prabálgarite i na Severite' i kám váprosa za 'prozihoda na dnešnite Balgari', *Byzantinoslavica*, Prague, 1933-34, pp. 216-225.

<sup>105</sup> See Zajaczkowski, W., 'K Etnogenezu Gagauzov', *Folia Orientalia*, vol. XV (1974), pp. 82-84.

<sup>106</sup> P. Mutaftchiev, *Die angebliche Einwanderung von Seldschuk-Türken in die Dobrudscha im XIII Jahrhundert*, Sofia, 1943, pp. 119-129.

<sup>107</sup> For example see Gradeshliev, I., *Gagauzite*, Sofia-Dobric, 1993.

general V. A. Moshkoff was one of the first Russians to propose an alternative theory to the Pecheneg or Cuman hypothesis. He instead linked them with Oğuz Turks that had crossed the Danube in 1064 only later to return to Russian territory where they mixed with other Turkic tribes and converted to Orthodox Christianity, thus forming the nomadic tribal confederacy known in history as the Karakalpak. According to Moshkoff the Gagauz are a remnant of the Karakalpak that supposedly crossed back into the Balkans during the 13<sup>th</sup> century under pressure from the Mongols.<sup>108</sup>

Yet another theory, credited to Bulgarian historian G. Balashev, was later taken up by the Polish scholar Kowalski in the 1930s<sup>109</sup> and by the Austrian scholar Paul Wittek<sup>110</sup> and another Pole, Wolodimir Zajaczkowski, in the 1970s<sup>111</sup>, links the Gagauz with the Seljuk followers of sultan Izz al-Din Kay-kaus II, who during the 13<sup>th</sup> century fled to the Byzantine empire under pressure from Mongol invaders. This theory, which rests largely on evidence from the epic tale of the history of the Seljuk of Rum, the 'Oghuzname' by Yazicioghlu Ali, as well as being perhaps the most romantic version of Gagauz ethnogenesis, is also the most widely accepted version of events outside the immediate region. What makes this theory even more attractive is that it also offers a solution to the problem of the etymology of the ethnonym 'Gagauz', which holders to this theory assert originates from the name of Kay-kaus. Even amongst the Gagauz of Moldova the connection with *Sarı Saltık*, the itinerant dervish saint of popular Balkan legend, who plays a role in the tale of the migration of Kay-kaus's followers to the Dobrudja that is attested in

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<sup>108</sup> See V. Moskoff, *Gagauzy Benderskogo Uezda – etnograficheskie ocherki i materialy*, Chişinău, 2004, pp. 14-21.

<sup>109</sup> Kowalski's detailed analysis of the Gagauz idiom identified its 'Southern' or 'Anatolian' character. However, he considered the Gagauz language to be composed of three historical strata the oldest being a Cuman/Pecheneg layer, followed by another group that arrived before the Ottomans composing a Seljuk strata, and finally the third historical strata being formed by the Ottoman colonial influence. See T. Kowalski, 'Les Turcs et la langues torque de la Bulgarie du nord-est', *Polska Akademia Umiejetnosci, Prace Komisji Orjentalistycznej*, no. 16, Krakow, 1933, pp. 1-28.

<sup>110</sup> See P. Wittek, 'Les Gagaouzes = Les gens de Kaykaus', *Rocznik Orientalistyczny*, 18 (1951-1952), pp. 12-24 and P. Wittek, 'Yazicioghlu 'Ali on the Christian Turks of the Dobrudja', *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, 21:3 (1952), pp. 639-668.

<sup>111</sup> See W. Zajaczkowski, 'K Etnogenezu Gagauzow', *Folia Orientalia*, vol. XV (1974), pp. 77-86 and W. Zajaczkowski, 'Sostoyania i blizha zadachi izuchenia Gagauzow', *Folia Orientalia*, vol. II, no. 1-2 (1960), pp. 43-60.

the 'Oghuzname', is entering popular consciousness.<sup>112</sup> Amongst the numerous supporters of this theory are several Turkish historians such as Kemal Karpat and Halil İnalcık.<sup>113</sup>

An alternative to this theory, proposed in 1984 by the Greek scholar Anastasios Iordanoglu, links the Gagauz with the Anatolian Greeks, rather than Seljuk Turks, that followed the Christian sultan İzz al-Din Kay-kaus II from Anatolia to the Byzantine Balkans.<sup>114</sup>

Early Greek and Romanian commentators tended to support the view that the Gagauz are in fact Turkified *Rum* or Byzantine Greeks.<sup>115</sup> Today this hypothesis has little scholarly support in Greece, Bulgaria or amongst the Gagauz. However, in recent decades the theory of the Greek origin of the Gagauz, whether Anatolian or Balkan, has once again begun to excite a small number of historians and activists on the Greek side and aid, if somewhat small in scale, from the Greek Church and government for the Gagauz Autonomous Region seems to indicate a tacit acceptance of links between the two peoples.<sup>116</sup> There is a saying that was popular amongst the Gagauz of earlier generations in Bessarabia, still very well known amongst the Gagauz of Greece and Bulgaria, which is used in support of this theory: "We changed our language, but we did not change our faith"; the implication of this being that the Gagauz originally spoke Greek or perhaps Bulgarian.<sup>117</sup>

Each of these theories on the ethnogenesis of the Gagauz has a religious dimension that is linked to the time and location of conversion of the ancestors of the Gagauz to

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<sup>112</sup> A comic book adventure for children about the history of the Gagauz includes an episode with the arrival Key-kaus II in the Dobrudja under the guidance of Sarı Saltık. On Sarı Saltık and his possible connections with the Gagauz see H. Norris, *Islam in the Balkans*, London: Hurst & Company, 1993, pp. 147-148.

<sup>113</sup> See K. Karpat, 'Gagauzların Tarihi Menşei üzerine ve Folklorundan Parçalar', in *I. Uluslararası Türk Folklor Kongresi Bildirileri, I. Çilt Genel Konular*, Ankara: Ankara Üniversitesi Başimevi, 1976, pp. 162-178 and H. İnalcık, 'Dobrudja', in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed, Leiden: E. J. Brill and London: Luzac, 1965, pp. 625-629.

<sup>114</sup> See A. Iordanoglu, 'Oi Gkagkaouzoï kai i katagogi tous', *Mikrasiatika Hronika*, vol. V (1984 – 85), pp. 391-409. One of the pieces of evidence used by Iordanoglu is the fact that up to their migration to Greece during the population exchange of the 1920s, a large portion of the Anatolian Greeks were in fact, as are the Gagauz, Turkish-speaking Orthodox Christians.

<sup>115</sup> The most notable proponent of this view was the Romanian historian Nicolae Iorga. See N. Iorga, *Studi Românski: Harta etnografică a noii Dobrogea a României*, Sofia, 1915.

<sup>116</sup> As mentioned earlier, Greece has its own Gagauz community; upper estimates place their number in the region of 20-30,000. They have largely assimilated linguistically into the Greek population and profess a Greek national identity. Officially Greece considers them an integral part of the Greek nation and as such not an ethnic minority. However, they retain a distinct cultural identity and attempt to preserve aspects of their heritage.

<sup>117</sup> See N. Louka, *Dimotika Tragoudia kai Diigiseis ton Gkagkaouzon tis Moldvias kai tis Oukranias*, Komotini: Ekdoseis Oikoumenikotis, 2008, pp. 19-21.

Orthodox Christianity. The establishment of a Greek origin for the Gagauz would ally them with the Greek state and clearly strengthen Greek claims in the ecclesiastical disputes that erupted in the Varna region of Dobrudja with the creation of the Bulgarian Exarchate in 1860s and continued into the 1900s. A Slavo-Bulgarian or proto-Bulgarian origin, which would mean conversion of their ancestors to Christianity somewhere between the 7<sup>th</sup> and the 9<sup>th</sup> centuries, on the other hand would make them the heirs of a common Bulgarian Orthodoxy and would help the expansionist policies of the Bulgarian Exarchists at the expense of the Grecophile clergy in that same dispute. Bulgarian claims would also support Bulgarian nationalist endeavours to incorporate the Gagauz into the ethnic nation.<sup>118</sup> Theories linked to Oğuz or Uz and Karakalpak tribes, which would place the time of conversion somewhere between the 11<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries, increased Russia's symbolic role as the Christianising nation and helped locate Russia as the cradle of Gagauz culture. All the theories that try to link the Gagauz to the Pecheneg, Cuman, Oğuz, Uz, Karakalpak and other Turkic tribes from Central Asia were in favour during the Soviet period not only because they link their ancestry with regions within the Soviet Union, but also because they present their Christianisation as a relatively insignificant, obscure and late historical event. For similar reasons these theories, especially those linking them to the Oğuz, are in favour amongst a majority of Turkish scholars who belong to the Kemalist nationalist tradition.

The Key-kaus theory, on the other hand, is attractive to the Islamist branch of Turkish scholars as it portrays the Gagauz as the descendents of Muslim Seljuks and links them to one of the great mystical figures of the early Turkish Balkans *Sarı Saltık Baba*. The Romanian historian Rezachievici also supports this theory but by locating the initial settlement of the Gagauz in the north of Dobrudja around the town of Babadag he was able to claim that the Romanians played a defining role in the Christianization of the Gagauz due to the close proximity of the Wallachian Metropolitan of Vicina.<sup>119</sup> In this way each of

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<sup>118</sup> Today, Bulgaria officially recognises the Gagauz of Bessarabia as overseas nationals and accepts applications for Bulgarian citizenship.

<sup>119</sup> See A. Macriș, 'Gagauzologia în România', in S. Kuroglo (ed.), *Etnogenez i Etnicheskaya Istoria Gagauzov: Materiali i Issledovaniia, Posviashennie 150-Letiu V. A. Moshkova*, Kishinev-Etulia: Serv-Grafica centrul de Editură "Ekin" basımı, 2002, pp. 182-183.



the hypotheses presented had the potential to create religious symbolic capital in the struggle to secure territory and the allegiance of the Gagauz.

The aim of this brief summary was to introduce the central building blocks of the many theories that have been expounded over the last century. There are many more variations on these themes that incorporate various ethnic and national elements into the process of Gagauz ethno-genesis. However, the most important point for us to note in these debates is that they originate or support, either explicitly or implicitly, one or other of the national ideological narratives of the states in the region and that these states had a vested interest in determining ethnic, national or historical affiliation of the Gagauz in the hope of either securing the allegiance of the various Gagauz populations or the territory on which they lived.

### 1.3. The Assimilation of Historical Narratives and Discourses in the Formation of Gagauz National Consciousness

In this study we are concerned with how this discourse helped determine the shape of Gagauz ethnic consciousness and how, in turn, this shaped the religiosity of the Gagauz of Bessarabia. In other parts of the Balkans this process followed divergent paths determined by the nationalist agendas of the countries in question. In the Budjak Steppe of Southern Bessarabia, home to the largest concentration of Gagauz anywhere in the region, the conditions proved congenial for the emergence of an indigenous Gagauz national movement and clergy sympathetic to national sentiments. The various narratives and agendas were interpreted and incorporated by the Gagauz into an emergent Gagauz national identity, a process that can be observed most clearly, and almost exclusively, in the writings of the Orthodox priest Mihail Çakir. Following the war years and the catastrophic events of the 1940s and 50s, Çakir's initial steps formed the basis upon which, or in relation to which, later national ideas were built. Çakir is a central figure both in terms of his contribution to Gagauz religious life, which we shall explore in more detail in chapter two, and the national movement.

Çakir is credited with having given the Gagauz their history. İvan Perçemli, a member of a Gagauz delegation that travelled to Chişinău to mark 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Çakir's work in the Church and education, wrote 'We thank you in the name of the Gagauz

people for the dear book the 'History of the Gagauz' that you have written. Now the Gagauz can know their own history, that they knew nothing of till now'.<sup>120</sup> The publication in 1933-4 in Romanian, originally under the title the 'Origins of the Gagauz', and the later translation into the Gagauz language, now re-titled 'The History of the Gagauz of Bessarabia', is a cultural landmark in the history of the Gagauz.<sup>121</sup> The symbolic significance of this work remains undiminished today and Çakir's status amongst the Gagauz of Bessarabia is also unrivalled. He commanded extraordinary respect during his lifetime and today he has been adopted as the single most important founding father of the Gagauz nation and has been invested with considerable symbolic capital. Because of this status his writings are rarely subjected to critical analysis and his views on Gagauz history, culture and religion are widely accepted as representing a 'truth' that is be revered and honoured rather than questioned.

In his publications in the interwar years, most important of which are his 'History of the Gagauz of Bessarabia' and several articles on Gagauz religion, customs and traditions, Çakir represented the till then little known and obscure Gagauz minority to the new Romanian elite of Chişinău and Greater Romania beyond.<sup>122</sup> In his portrayal of Gagauz identity we encounter a synthesis of several conflicting aspects that on examination appear fraught with tension. The building blocks of Gagauz identity are expressly religious in character and Çakir manages to incorporate into his construct a number of conflicting elements such as Islamic religious fanaticism inherited from the Ottomans, Russian piety and morality, pure Turkic race, and a tenacious allegiance to Orthodoxy. Çakir's motivation for bringing together these diverse aspects and his ability to present them as parts of an integral identity was determined by and dependent on the political and religious climate of Bessarabia at the time. As we discussed above, the inter-

<sup>120</sup> Ciachir (Çakir), M., (Ay Boba), *Gagauzlar: İstoriya, Adellâr, Dil hem Din*, Pontos: Chişinău, 2007, p. 37.

<sup>121</sup> First published in the journal *Viaţa Basarabiei* in the Romanian language in two parts under the title 'Origina Găgăuzilor' (M. Ciachir, 'Origina Găgăuzilor', *Viaţa Basarabiei*, no. 9 (1933), pp. 15-24 and M. Ciachir, 'Origina Găgăuzilor', *Viaţa Basarabiei*, no. 5 (1934), pp. 3-20), it was later published in Gagauzian as: *Besarabialâ Gagauzların İstorieası*, Chişinău, 1934. More recently it has been translated into Turkish under the title *Basarabyalı Gagauzların Tarihi*, (Besarabialâ Gagauzlarân İstoriasâ), Niğde: Tolunay, 1998.

<sup>122</sup> He published six articles in the Romanian language in the journal *Viaţa Basarabiei* between 1934 and 1936. These are: 'Religisitatea găgăuzilor', *Viaţa Basarabiei*, 3 (1934), pp. 21-28; 'Obiceiurile religioase ale găgăuzilor: Curbanele său sacrificele', *Viaţa Basarabiei*, 6 (1934), pp. 4-8; 'Obiceiurile religioase ale găgăuzilor din Basarabia: II. Obiceiuri la nastere şi botez', *Viaţa Basarabiei*, 7-8 (1934), pp. 37-40; 'Moralitatea Găgăuzilor din Basarabia', *Viaţa Basarabiei*, 2 (1935), pp. 36-42; 'Dreptatea la Găgăuzii din Basarabia', *Viaţa Basarabiei*, 10 (1935), pp. 11-14; 'Obiceiurile Găgăuzilor la nunti', *Viaţa Basarabiei*, 3-4 (1936), pp. 41-44.

war period in Greater Romania was dominated by a totalizing national discourse that sought to consolidate the ethnic Romanian nation. This national discourse also had an expressly religious dimension in the form of the political theology of Orthodoxism, which we shall explore below. The effects of these ethnic, racial and religious dimensions of the Romanian national discourse can be detected in Çakir's construction of Gagauz identity in his writings. In 1933 Çakir wrote: 'Now the Romanian authorities want to make known who the Gagauz really are and how many true Gagauz can be found in Romania'.<sup>123</sup> These seemingly innocent aims take on a more sinister character in the light of the racial policies of the Romanian government and of the fascist Iron Guard legionary movement in the 1940s.

Çakir famously states in his 'History of the Gagauz of Bessarabia' that the 'most renowned writers have clearly shown that the Gagauz have their origins in the Turkic Uz, in the Oguz, and in the family of the true Turk'.<sup>124</sup> Although, Çakir recounts the theories that historians have proposed on the origins of the Gagauz he settles on the Uz or Oguz hypothesis that is proposed, in one form or another, by the Czech historian Yiriçek, the Russians Moshkoff and Radloff, and the Bulgarian Manov. However, the main argument that he uses to support this theory are the comments of Metropolitan Makarii of Moscow, who on a visit to Bessarabia to see Archbishop Vladimir of Chişinău, asked to meet some Gagauz or to read something in their language as he was curious to know what kind of people they were. Makari had been a missionary amongst the Tartars and other Turkic peoples of the Russian Empire and was therefore considered by Çakir to be more than familiar with Turkic languages. Upon reading Çakir's translation of prayers and the Gospels, Çakir reports him as saying:

The Gagauz language is a pure Turkic language, the true Turkic language, it is very similar to that of the Uygur, who live now in the asian Altay mountains, and to that of the Turks, who live on the banks of the Orhon river. The Uygur of the Altay and the Turks of the Orhon river are the ancestors of the other Turks, they speak just like the Gagauz. The Gagauz are also of the Turk family; they speak the same way as the Turks spoke Old Turkish a thousand years ago. History tells us that many Turkic tribes (nations) passed from Asia to the Russian lands from where they passed to the other side of the

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<sup>123</sup> Çakir, *Gagauzlar*, p. 60.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 79.

Danube when they were attacked by the Mongols and the Tartars. Amongst them were to be found the Gagauz.<sup>125</sup>

Çakir goes on to state:

Metropolitan Makari was delighted when he heard that the Gagauz are Christians of the true faith, that they are religious and pious, and he said, 'true Turks are good spirited, open hearted, honest, hospitable people, they always make good Christians'.<sup>126</sup>

So, in this report we can read explicitly how Çakir links the natural propensity for Christianity of the Gagauz with the positive qualities that accrue from their pure Turkic race.

Çakir was well aware of the competing Greek and Bulgarian national discourses on the ethnic origins of the Gagauz. Indeed Çakir writes that 'there is a lot of animosity between the Bulgarians and Greeks over the Gagauz, because the Bulgarians try to pull the Gagauz towards themselves and to Bulgarianise them, but the Greeks too work to pull them to their own side, and to Greekify them'.<sup>127</sup> In order to counter these attempts and the theories that supported them Çakir turns to the wisdom of the Gagauz people themselves. He goes to some length to recount the opinions of 'the old, the learned and the *Hacı* Gagauz' (those that had undertaken the *Hacılık* or pilgrimage to the Holy Land) with regard to their identity.<sup>128</sup> The Gagauz are not Greek, according to this recorded oral tradition; they merely present themselves as Turkophonised Greeks who had lost their language in times of Ottoman oppression so that they will be accepted by Greeks and the Phanariot elite of Moldavia. Çakir concludes his remarks on Greek origins by pointing out that the Gagauz are not at all like Greeks in their facial features, their traditions, their customs, nor their character.

The notion that Gagauz are Turkophonised Bulgarians can be discounted, according to Çakir, on the basis that the Gagauz themselves do not recognise the word 'Bulgar' but refer to Bulgarians as *Tukan*. The *Tukan* always live separately from the

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<sup>125</sup> Ibid., p. 77. Note, in reality the Gagauz idiom, contrary to Metropolitan Makari's comments, is not amongst the Turkic languages most closely related to Turkic of the Altay region and of the Uygur and is certainly not mutually intelligible with the Turkic languages and dialects of Mongolia and Xinjiang.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid., p. 59.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid., p. 73.

Gagauz, in their own villages or, when they share a village, in their own *maalä* or quarter. According to Çakir the Gagauz of Bessarabia, unlike those in Greece or Bulgaria who have lost their mother tongue and mixed with other nations, are 'pure, true Gagauz'.<sup>129</sup> Çakir, quoting a 'clever, wise and lean old Gagauz man', then goes on to describe the character of Bulgarians in comparison to that of the Gagauz. The Bulgarians come out somewhat unfavourably of course; they are described as 'petulant, narrow minded, harsh, quarrelsome, angry, cold, solitary, stubborn, worthless in times of difficulty, greedy, always looking for profit, closed and secretive', and on the positive side 'hard working, sober, and keen' to name but a few attributes. The Gagauz on the other hand are 'religious, pious, of good faith, believers, willing to make sacrifices, honest, peaceful, open-hearted, good-spirited, calm, lyrical, agreeable, generous, happy, cheerful, hospitable and respectful'. However, all of these positive qualities are tempered by their gullibility, which according to Çakir is having disastrous consequences in the religious sphere. The conclusion he reaches from this comparison is that the Gagauz are nothing like Bulgarians and are therefore Turks.

In his articles dealing with Gagauz religion from this period Çakir also goes to some length to stress the cultural affinities that, through their religious practices, the Gagauz hold with the Ottoman Turks. Most notable of these is the Gagauz tradition of *Hacılık* or pilgrimage to the Holy Land. Çakir presents the *Hacılık* as part of a Turkish and Islamic heritage, whilst ignoring the obvious links with Russian spiritual traditions of pilgrimage to the Holy Land. One of the main routes from Russia to Black Sea and on to the Levant passed close to the Gagauz regions of Bessarabia en route to make sea passage from Odessa. Çakir's portrayal of this tradition may represent a conscious decision to down play affinities with Russian spirituality at a time when the Gagauz belonged to the Romanian Orthodox Church and Russia represented a threat to Orthodoxy due to Bolshevik anti-religious propaganda emanating from over the border in Soviet Ukraine. Çakir's preference for Turkish connections at this time also has a political dimension, which we shall explore further in chapter two (see pages 88-90).

In this same article on Gagauz religiosity, Çakir highlights further traditions to demonstrate a close spiritual and linguistic links with the Turks and the Turkic world, such as *Kurban* sacrifice and the tradition of *Allahlık*, which is supposed to have connections

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<sup>129</sup> Ibid., p. 73.

with Central Asian Turkic traditions of ritual animal sacrifice. Çakir closes his discussion of these traditions with the following statement: 'The religiosity of the Gagauz demonstrates the probability of their shared life with the Turks, who, as is well known, are religious to the point of fanaticism.'<sup>130</sup>

From the formulations we have looked at thus far we can see that Çakir tries to create a harmonious synthesis of religious zeal and ethnic purity inherited from a Turkic (and Turkish) ancestral heritage. But the fact remains that the Gagauz, along with the other colonists from the Balkans, had fled precisely the same Turkic people with whom they were supposed to share such powerful affinities. The Orthodoxy of the Gagauz is the dimension of their identity more than any other that had determined the course of their recent history. Çakir himself remarks that the Russian-Turkish wars had the 'character of medieval crusades... a war between cross and crescent, between Christianity and Islam' with the aim of liberating Christians from Turkish rule and, as we noted earlier, it was during this period that the 'religious feeling' of the Gagauz of Bessarabia is said by Çakir to have developed.<sup>131</sup> Therefore, Çakir's third major theme is the influence of Russian religiosity on the Gagauz. The religious character of the wars had the effect on the Gagauz, according to Çakir, of 'amplifying' even further the religious zeal that was to be found amongst the Russians.<sup>132</sup> The Russian colonial authorities, the generals, officers and administrators, sponsored and organised religious life in the new colonies and set an example for the settlers of strict religious and moral standards. The period of the colonial administration, from 1816 to 1872, is the golden age of Gagauz religious and moral order, in Çakir's view: 'The morality of the Gagauz was at its highest and most exemplary not only in the period of the colonial administration but in the whole time up to the world war.'<sup>133</sup>

In this way Çakir establishes a picture of the Gagauz as a religiously pious, moral, and god-fearing people. This character is formed from three components, the purity of their Turkic blood, which gives them the biological basis on which the crusader spirit of the Russian Tsarist army could imprint a devotion to Orthodox Christianity that is enduring

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<sup>130</sup> M. Chiachir, 'Religiositatea găgăuzilor', *Viața Basarabiei*, 3 (1934), p. 25. Çakir fails to mention or, less likely, had no knowledge of the custom of *Kurban* amongst other Balkan Christians, especially amongst the Greeks where animal sacrifice goes under the name of *kurbani*.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 25.

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>133</sup> M. Ciachir, 'Moralitatea Găgăuzilor din Basarabia', *Viața Basarabiei*, 2 (1935), p. 106.

and steadfast, as well as the influence of the religious 'fanaticism' of the Ottoman Turks. These three elements form the basis of an idea of Gagauz identity that Çakir represents to a Romanian and Turkish readership and, in the form of advice and guidance, to a Gagauz audience of young intellectuals, mainly school teachers and priests, working in Gagauz villages.<sup>134</sup>

Çakir was undoubtedly influenced during this period by the religious dimension of the Romanian national discourse. Çakir's formulations, the style and the symbols he employs, are reminiscent of the Orthodoxism of Nichifor Crainic and the ideas expressed in his journal *Gândirea*. Crainic was a lecturer at the new Theology Faculty in Chişinău from 1926 until the close of the war and Çakir would certainly have been aware of nationalist ideology that was drawing on the mystical resources of Romanian Orthodoxy.<sup>135</sup> The connections between extreme right wing ideologies and a form of mystical Orthodoxy stretch back into the 1920s with the formation of the League of the Archangel Michael and the ideas of Nae Ionescu, the intellectual mentor of the new generations of young Romanian nationalists, amongst whose students we also find the young Mircea Eliade.<sup>136</sup>

Çakir's construction of Gagauz national identity, like that of the majority Romanians, is indivisible from their religious identity. The extent of this total association for Çakir between the Gagauz and Orthodoxy is clear from his writings. In both the 'History of the Gagauz of Bessarabia' and his Gagauz language journal *Hakikatın Sesi*, Çakir expresses explicitly what he believes to be the most serious threats to the Gagauz nation. They arise from two sources that mirror the basic pillars of Gagauz identity that Çakir has identified; the first and most dangerous is the threat to the soul that comes from the *Allahsız komunist* or the 'Godless Communist', and from Baptists and Adventists and

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<sup>134</sup> Çakir is reported to have sent a copy of his 'History of the Gagauz' to Mustafa Kemal Atatürk himself. This was followed by an invitation from the Turkish president to come to Turkey and meet with him and to stay in Turkey for a year from the Autumn of 1938. The deaths of both Atatürk and Çakir in 1938 prevented this from happening. See M. Argunşah & H. Argunşah, *Gagauz yazıları*, Kayseri: Türk Ocakları Kayseri Şubesi Yayınları, 2007, pp. 46-53, N. Çakir, 'Gagauzlar hem Çakir senselesi prof. Dr. Nikolay Çakir', *Sabaa Yıldızı*, 10 (1999), pp. 42-47, H. Serarşan, *Hamdullah Subhi Tamrıöver*, Ankara: Türk Kültürünün Araştırma Enstitüsü Yayınları, 1995, pp. 151-156, Ö. Çobanoğlu, *Anavatan'dan anavatan'a bir Gagauz*, İstanbul: Yesevi Yayıncılık, 2003, p. 28, Yaşar Nabi, *Balkanlar ve Türklük*, Ankara: Ulus Basımevi, 1936, pp. 57-114.

<sup>135</sup> On Orthodoxism and Orthodoxy in Bessarabia in this period see Bâtcă, V., 'Biserică Ortodoxă şi Spiritualitatea Românească în Basarabia Interbelică', *Luminătorul*, 4: 43, 1999, pp. 14-21.

<sup>136</sup> Livezeanu, *Cultural Politics*, pp. 301-305.

other heretics and sects.<sup>137</sup> These are external threats that are the result of the new-found 'liberality' that resulted from, amongst other things, the Russian Revolution. Çakir writes:

Some Gagauz have begun shamelessly to abandon the religion of their mothers and fathers, to discard the true faith of Orthodox Christianity, like the Jew, to sell and discard the cross of Christ, and to become Baptists, Adventists, and join other sects... Amongst the foolish Gagauz will be found such stupid men who shamelessly become atheist communists, godless wolves.<sup>138</sup>

This threat to Orthodoxy goes hand in hand with a fear of moral decay:

There is *one* reason that this small people could perish, if, at a certain time, they become restless, they are not disciplined, and they [do not] forget about the dangers of drunkenness and other vices. These, from year to year, are increasing and become heavy stones that weigh on the decadent shoulders of the Gagauz and their social life.<sup>139</sup>

Of course these two factors are inseparably linked. The Orthodoxy of the Gagauz preserves the moral order of Gagauz society and their high moral virtues are in turn the mark of Gagauz identity. The loss of moral order, due to a decline in adherence to the Orthodox faith would, according to Çakir, result in the death of the nation.

Because the Gagauz are very religious and the morality of a man depends a great deal on his religiosity, they can be distinguished through the high morality in their family life, as in their social life – that is to say they are pious, they try hard to strengthen their Christian faith through Christian virtue. Being religious, the Gagauz show their fear of God, humility, a strong faith in the Lord, hope, love and submission to his will. Justice and honesty are the distinctive qualities of the Gagauz.<sup>140</sup>

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<sup>137</sup> The Gagauz language religious newspaper *Hakikatın Sesi* that Çakir produced throughout the inter-war period is mostly devoted to attacking the new 'sects' of Baptists and Adventists and the Communists that, as Çakir perceived it, posed a threat to Orthodoxy, the moral order and the Gagauz nation. However, these were not just the concerns of Çakir as the Moldovan Orthodox Church in general in its journal *Luminătorul* often devoted space during this time to reporting on the *lupta cu sectanții*, 'the battle with the sectists', in the south of Bessarabia. See for example I. Belodanov, 'Activitatea misionarilor cerc. I jud. Ismail', *Luminătorul*, 42 (1921), pp. 79-82.

<sup>138</sup> Çakir (Ay Boba), 'Gagauzlar', p. 79.

<sup>139</sup> *ibid.*, p. 106.

<sup>140</sup> Ciachir, 'Moralitatea', p. 106.



Çakir's representation of Gagauz identity, the political and religious consequences of which we shall look at in more detail in the following chapter, went on to form one of the principal building blocks for the construction of a Gagauz national consciousness in the post-Soviet era. The Gagauz historian Stepan Bulgar sums up Çakir's unique role in defining Gagauz nationhood in the following terms.

In the soul of the Gagauz people there is always place for Mihail Çakir. As a result of his work as a religious and spiritual leader the Gagauz began to see themselves as collective, as a nation. He was a spiritual shepherd of his people all his life and at the end of his life he became a symbol of the nation because he revealed the Gagauz national spirit.<sup>141</sup>

#### 1.4. Nationhood and Religion in the Post-Çakir Years

Mihail Çakir died in 1938 just before the diplomatic and military actions that would see Greater Romania lose much of the territory she had gained only 20 years earlier. In the final years before the war the Soviet Union restated its claim over Bessarabia at the same time as the irredentist ambitions of Romania's other neighbours, Hungary and Bulgaria, were on the agenda in Hitler's Berlin. In 1939 the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact between Germany and the Soviet Union effectively granted the Soviets free reign in determining the future of Bessarabia. An ultimatum issued to Romania on June 26<sup>th</sup> 1940 gave her 24 hours to cede the territory and northern Bukovina, another contested province that had also once been part of the Moldavian Principality, to the Soviet Union. Within 4 days Bessarabia was once again under Soviet control. The newly annexed Bessarabian territory was subsequently divided by Soviet authorities between a new Moldavian SSR, proclaimed on 2<sup>nd</sup> August 1940, and Ukraine. For the Gagauz communities this resulted in a new administrative separation, which placed a number of villages within the borders of the Ukrainian Soviet Republic. However, this state of affairs was not to last long.

The loss of territory to the Soviets strengthened the hand of the ultra-right and pro-German groups in Romania and by November 1940 the new prime-minister, Marshall

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<sup>141</sup> S. Bulgar, 'Mihail Çakirin Biografiası', in Çakir, 'Gagauzlar', p. 33.

Antonescu, had committed Romania to the Axis and therefore also ultimately to war with the Soviet Union.<sup>142</sup> By July 1941, following the joint Axis invasion of the Soviet Union, Bessarabia was once again back under Romanian rule.

During the war years the national discourse intensified and the place of ethno-linguistic and religious minorities within the Romanian state and their relationship to the titular ethnic nation became even more precarious. The ideological discourse that underscored efforts to reoccupy and secure territory for the nation, both symbolically and physically, gave rise to racial policies that sought to identify alien elements within the national body that posed a threat, and develop plans to integrate them or expel them from the ethnic motherland. This discourse utilised two distinct means of determining membership of the nation, one based on membership of the Romanian Orthodox Church with its role as the moral and spiritual centre of the nation, and the other based on the young sciences of eugenics and racial anthropology.

In the 1940s the Antonescu regime began to utilise eugenic and racial anthropological studies to identify non-Romanian stock within the state. The Gagauz were the subject of one such study published in 1940, which sought to determine their 'origins and anthropological structure'.<sup>143</sup> The results of these studies were used to support racial policies of social engineering designed to fortify the nation. One recent commentator has suggested, based on a report that has recently come to light in the Romanian National Archive, that these plans equated to a systematic policy of 'ethnic purification' of the country of all ethnic minorities.<sup>144</sup> The main instrument available to achieve this end was the exchange of populations between states. Population transfers of suspect and unwanted minorities had already been carried out between Romania and Bulgaria in 1940, between the two halves of the newly apportioned Dobrudja, and they were also on the agenda between Hungary and Romania in 1942.<sup>145</sup>

With the return of Bessarabia in 1941, and the hasty and brutal murder and expulsion of its Jewish population, Antonescu decided to make Bessarabia, along with

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<sup>142</sup> Van Meurs, *The Bessarabian Question*, p. 86.

<sup>143</sup> O. Necrasov, *Le problème de l'origine des Gagaouzes et la structure anthropologique de ce groupement ethnique*, Lucrările Soc. Geografice Dimitrie Cantemir III, Iași, 1940.

<sup>144</sup> See V. Solonari, 'An Important New Document on the Romanian Policy of Ethnic Cleansing During WWII', *Holocaust and Genocide Studies*, 2:21 (2007), p. 268.

<sup>145</sup> C. Davis, 'Restocking the Ethnic Homeland: Ideological and Strategic Motives behind Hungary's "Hazatelepítés" Schemes During WWII (and the Unintended Consequences)', *Regio*, 1 (2007), pp. 155-174.

Bukovina, model Romanian provinces. Part of this scheme was to evacuate all ethnically alien stock in Bessarabia, namely the Bulgarians, Gagauz, Russians and Ukrainians, and replace them with Romanians. The report mentioned above, which was drawn up by the 'Undersecretary of State for Romanianization, Colonization and Inventory' in 1942, designated the Gagauz, along with the Bulgarians and other Slavs, as an ethnic component that 'continue to cultivate a different ideology and maintain sentiments that are hostile to our nation' and the report goes on to state that 'they represent a great threat to Romanian culture and to the defence of the state'. The report concludes that 'a serious and urgent Romanianization, that is to say replacement of these foreign elements through Romanian colonization, is imperative'.<sup>146</sup>

Romania's designs for the Gagauz, which revolved around a potential agreement to transplant them to Turkey,<sup>147</sup> the Bulgarians and other minorities of Bessarabia, were never realised as the war on the Eastern Front began to go increasingly badly for the Axis and the Romanian leadership began to fear the war might be lost.<sup>148</sup>

In 1944 Romania affected a hasty volte-face in the face of the Russian advances in the east into Romanian territory. In the new socialist order Romania was obliged to once again cede Bessarabia to the Soviet Union. The division of southern Bessarabia between the Moldavian Soviet Republic and Ukraine was reinstated and the Gagauz communities entered a new phase in their history as a Soviet *narod* or nationality.

Immediately after the war the Soviet authorities continued their policy of arrests and deportations of political undesirables, which had started in 1940-41. Some were imprisoned, others sent to forced labour camps and isolated regions of Central Asia and Siberia. Many Gagauz, including entire families, were deported to Kazakhstan and the Altai on charges of collaboration with the Germans, of anti-Soviet activities, for being Kulaks, and for failing to declare and hand over agricultural produce. The deportations intensified in the summer of 1949 during the collectivization campaigns when from one

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<sup>146</sup> *Arhivă Națională București*, Presedinția Consiliului de Miniștri (PCM), Cabinetul Civil, Mihai Antonescu, 1942. Inventar 2241, Fond 78, Dosar 244, p. 6.

<sup>147</sup> Following an agreement made in 1936 between Romania and Turkey, 70,000 Muslim Turks had already left Dobruđa for Turkey. See P. Ahonen, G. Corni, J. Kochanowski, R. Schulze, T. Stark and B. Stelzl-Marx, *People on the Move: Forced Population Movements in Europe in the Second World War and its Aftermath*, Oxford and New York: Berg, 2008, p. 55.

<sup>148</sup> For a full discussion of why these plans were never carried through see Solonari, 'An Important New Document', pp. 282-287.

Gagauz village, *Kazayak*, 92 people were deported to the Altai and other regions of Siberia.<sup>149</sup> Across Moldova 11,342 families suffered the same fate that summer.<sup>150</sup>

In the winter of 1946-47 another catastrophe struck the Gagauz, along with the other peoples of Bessarabia and Ukraine. The entire region suffered a terrible draught, and following grain requisitioning by the Soviet authorities, famine ensued bringing starvation and death on a massive scale.<sup>151</sup> This series of events immediately following the devastation of the war had an enormous impact on the Gagauz. Very many families were affected by one or other, or both, of these tragedies. The grandfather of my host family in the village of *Kazayak* was an orphan of the famine and his wife, the step-grandmother of the family, was deported as an infant together with her family to the Altai. The hardship, suffering and loss of life experienced during these years appear to have been particularly formative of Gagauz conceptions of collective identity and historical memory. These events are of course within living memory and the discontinuity and dislocation caused by these events are cited as reasons for the loss of much traditional knowledge and customs, which is particularly significant in the sphere of lay religious practice as we shall see in the following chapters.

In the religious sphere the whole period from the 1950s through to the late 1980s was characterised by anti-religious propaganda and restrictive policies on the part of the authorities. Again we shall discuss this in greater detail in the following chapter, but the most significant development to affect organised religious life was the closure of the churches and monasteries. The number of churches functioning in Moldova had fallen from over 1100 to just under 200 by 1988.<sup>152</sup> In the regions populated by Gagauz only a very small number of churches remained open during this period, most notably in the Gagauz villages of *Kongaz* (Congaz) and *Çok Maidan* (Cioc Maidan) and the Bulgarian village of Tvardița and the town of Bolgrad in the neighbouring Odessa Oblast of Ukraine.

From the mid-1980s, in the atmosphere of Glasnost and Perestroika, the Gagauz alongside many other Soviet nationalities began to mobilise in defence of their cultural and linguistic rights. In the intervening years ethnologists, linguists, turkologists and historians

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<sup>149</sup> Muzeul Național De Istorie A Moldovei, *Cartea Memoriei: Catalog al victimelor totalitarismului comunist*, Vol. IV, Chișinău: Știința, 2005, pp. 323-327.

<sup>150</sup> M. Păcurariu, *Basarabia: Aspecte din Istoria Bisericii și a Neamului Românesc*, Iași: Editura Mitropoliei Moldovei și Bucovinei, 1993, p. 124.

<sup>151</sup> King, *The Moldovans*, p. 96.

<sup>152</sup> N. Dima, 'Politics and Religion in Moldova: A Case Study', *The Mankind Quarterly*, 3 (1994), p. 184.

of the Soviet Union had paid no interest in the Gagauz and did nothing to sponsor the development of a ethno-national identity and thus Çakır's conception remained intact amongst the tiny Gagauz intellectual elite until the mid 1980s. After decades of Russification, and in the atmosphere of renewed nationalism amongst ethnic Moldovans, the Gagauz now feared that the Moldovan government would pursue a policy of Romanianization of her minorities and in the early 1990s the fear that Moldova would also seek unification with Romania was very real. In response to these fears the local Gagauz leadership, which had grown out of the *Gagauz Halkı* or the 'Gagauz people' cultural movement, declared the creation of an autonomous republic in September 1989. On the 19<sup>th</sup> August 1990 the Gagauz Congress of Deputies in the Gagauz republican parliament proclaimed the creation of a 'Gagauz Soviet Socialist Republic' and the *Gagauz Halkı* movement was declared illegal by the Moldovan authorities.<sup>153</sup> A military stand-off ensued between Gagauz volunteers known as the 'Budjak Battalion' and Moldovan militia and irregulars. The intervention of Soviet interior ministry troops prevented an escalation of hostilities but the stalemate continued until long after Moldova declared independence in 1991.

The geopolitical significance of the territorial dispute with the Gagauz can only be fully appreciated in the light of the ongoing political crisis over the breakaway Transnistrian Republic. Transnistria is the region of Moldova lying east of the Dnestr River. This territory, even more ethnically heterogeneous than the rest of the republic, was the centre of Moldovan industry and was fiercely loyal to first the Soviet Union and now Russia. This dispute remains unresolved today, largely because of Russian intransigence due to her desire to keep Moldova, and also Ukraine, from moving closer to the West and away from the Russian sphere of influence. In the early 1990s the Gagauz were able to co-ordinate their efforts with the pro-Soviet leadership in Transnistria to put maximum pressure on the Moldovan government for concessions. After the 1994 elections, when the Moldovan leadership passed to more moderate forces prepared to compromise on national ideals in the interest of stability, a solution was reached with the Gagauz whereby individual settlements in the southern *raions* were given the option of opting in or out of the autonomous region. In March 1995 a referendum was held in which 3 towns, *Komrat*, which subsequently became the capital of the region, *Çadır Lunga*, and *Vulkanest*, and 23

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<sup>153</sup> King, *The Moldovans*, pp. 215-217.

villages chose to join the *Unitatea Teritorială Autonomă Găgăuzia* as it became officially known. Today, Gagauz generally refer to the region as *Gagauziya* or *Gagauz Eri*, literally 'Gagauz Land' and also simply as *Yug* or 'the South'.

The role of Turkey in smoothing the way for Gagauz autonomy is often cited. Since independence Moldova has supported close ties between the Gagauz and Turkey in the hope of weaning the Gagauz away from their traditional pole of gravity, Russia, and since the establishment of the Gagauz Autonomous Region Turkey has poured considerable resources into the region. Turkey has funded improvements in infrastructure, especially water supply, Gagauz language newspapers and media, and education. However, Turkish involvement in *Gagauziya* is not always appreciated by ordinary Gagauz who often display mistrust, and even antipathy, towards Muslim Turks that visit or come to live in the region. The arrival of this new element on the local ethnic and religious landscape seems to be prompting some re-evaluation of ideas of Gagauz national consciousness and identity amongst the Gagauz intelligentsia and leadership.

The creation of a Gagauz political entity at the close of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was not a forgone, or even a likely, conclusion. It was the result of a combination of chance events and political manoeuvres that arose from the national ambitions of competing states. Romania, Russia, Moldova and Turkey, alongside the local Gagauz elite, all had a part to play. As we have seen, Gagauz identity has been moulded historically by a series of geographical, political and social dislocations and constructed from a range of competing discourses that have instrumentalized and mythologized narratives of ethno-genesis, origins and religious destiny. In the post-Soviet era the Gagauz of Bessarabia have been faced with new existential challenges determined by political and economic crises. These have once again provoked some reassessment within Gagauz society on how to conceive Gagauz identity and nationhood.

### 1.5. The Contested Nature of Gagauz Identity in the post-Soviet Era

Since the break-up of the Soviet Union and the formation of the Gagauz Autonomous Region conceptions of nationhood and identity have become subject to a far more diverse set of influences. An increased awareness and experience of the world has been precipitated by economic collapse and dislocation at home. Large numbers of Gagauz,

perhaps as much as one third of the working population, work abroad in Russia, Turkey and the EU. For most families, transnational labour migration has become the norm rather than the exception. According to one estimate, about 50,000 Gagauz have worked or are working abroad and of these about half are women working in Turkey.<sup>154</sup>

Turkish influence is more deeply felt on a day-to-day level due to economic investment in the region by the Turkish government and the opening and funding of institutions, mainly through the Turkish state organisation *TİKA* (Turkish Cooperation and Development Agency), such as the Atatürk Turkish Library in Komrat, Turkish run schools, the Gagauz State Radio and Television Station, the Gagauz language newspapers and magazines, as well as some private business enterprises. However, this influence is tempered with suspicion on the part of ordinary Gagauz. Gagauz who work in Turkey, mainly women who take domestic employment with families, despite their shared language find little in common with Turks culturally and are generally suspicious of Islam. Marriages between Turkish men and Gagauz women, although not rare, are frowned upon. A significant number of Turkish students also study at the Gagauz State University in *Komrat* where rivalry and mutual mistrust between Gagauz and Turkish students was often tangible during my stay there.

These practical experiences of the Turks as the 'ethnic other' can be contrasted with the romanticised view of Gagauz history that links them with a mythic Turkic past in the steppes of Central Asia. In Soviet period historiography, the emphasis was on strengthening the Gagauz nation's historical and cultural connections with Russia and the other nations of the Soviet Union, especially the Turkic ones. In the Gagauz cultural revival that came in the 1980s these historical themes became particularly popular. Dionis Tanasoglu wrote his epic trilogy *Uzun Kervan*,<sup>155</sup> or 'The Long Caravan', in the early 1980s, which in the form of novel, traces the history of the ancestors of the Gagauz amongst the nomadic Oghuz, Cumans and Pechenegs, and their long march across the steppe to their present home in the Balkans and Bessarabia. The way in which the line between fiction and history have become blurred in popular consciousness can be demonstrated by the remarks made by one the most eminent Gagauz professors of literature in his introduction to *Uzun Kervan*

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<sup>154</sup> Keough, L., 'Globalizing 'Postsocialism': Mobile Mothers and Neoliberalism on the Margins of Europe', *Anthropological Quarterly*, 3:79 (2006), p. 441.

<sup>155</sup> D. Tanasoglu, *Uzun Kervan*, Chişinău, 1985.

The birth of a novel is not an accident that came about without certain “anxiety” unexpectedly to Tanasoglu. We can say that it was prepared in former times with the true events of our lives. Such a great work in the form of an epic novel offers the possibility to answer many questions that appear in the life of a people. It shows that a people that wishes to know about their own roots, to understand the events of history, can do this with the help of literature.<sup>156</sup>

The works of Tanasoglu and others have been incorporated into school textbooks as history, or at least viable representations of historical truths. Literary constructions of a mythic Gagauz Golden Age and medieval statehood, in the form of the *Uzi Eyaleti*,<sup>157</sup> have entered popular consciousness through works of writers such as Stamatoglu, who also advances the idea that the Gagauz are autochthonous to Bessarabia and that they played a crucial role in the foundation of the Moldavia principality.<sup>158</sup> In the consciousness of the contemporary Gagauz intelligentsia this Turkic, as opposed to Turkish, dimension is growing particularly strong.

Since Çakir’s time, portrayals of connections with Islamic Turkey and Ottoman culture have been largely restricted to the works of Turkish historians. It is not surprising that Çakir’s writings from the 1930s should have inspired a new generation of Turkish scholars that have emphasised the Turkish Islamic origins of the Gagauz. Çakir pointed the way by highlighting Gagauz traditions of *Hacılık*, *Kurban* and *Allahlık* mentioned earlier. In the 1990s the historian Harun Güngör wrote on Gagauz religion and the Islamic elements present in Gagauz cosmology, religious vocabulary and customs based on secondary documentary evidence.<sup>159</sup> A popular travel book written by a Turkish nationalist politician who travelled to *Gagauziya* also pointed to the Gagauz custom of *Kurban* and

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<sup>156</sup> Baurçulu, ‘İstoriya Tematikası’, p. 144.

<sup>157</sup> Uzi, Ozi, Uzu or Ozu was the Ottoman name of the river Dnieper as well as of the modern town of Ockakov at its mouth. *Uzi Eyaleti* was the name of the administrative unit (eyelet) created by the Ottomans at the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, which stretched from the border at the lower Dnieper deep into the eastern Balkan Black Sea coastal regions. The idea that the *Uzi Eyaleti* was the name of a pre-Ottoman medieval state of the Gagauz is certainly due to the misinterpretation by some 20<sup>th</sup> century commentators of the term Uzi being a form of the ethnonym Uz or Oğuz. Evliya Celebi who visited the north eastern Balkan territories of the Ottoman empire in the 17<sup>th</sup> century referred to this region by its official name at the time, the Uzi Eyaleti. See ‘Özi’ in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed, Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1995, p. 236.

<sup>158</sup> G. Stamatoglu, *Gagauzların Altın Kitabı (Gagauzların Tarihi hem Etnogenezi)*, Chişinău: Prag-3, 1995.

<sup>159</sup> See in particular H. Güngör, ‘Gagavuzların Hristiyanlığı Kabulü ve İnanışlarındaki İslami Unsurlar Meselesi’, *Türk Dünyası Araştırmaları*, 27 (1983), pp. 248-254.



to the way the Gagauz prostrate during prayer in Church, which in his view was similar to the Muslim *namaz*.<sup>160</sup> These Turkish expressions of an Islamic heritage for the Gagauz are not popular amongst Gagauz scholars and the Islamic connection may also be the reason why the Kay-kaus theory, proposed by Wittek and others, implying a Muslim Seljuk origin of the Gagauz is not well received amongst Bessarabian Gagauz.

The presence of Muslim Turks in *Gagauziya* is of special concern to the Orthodox priesthood who are more wary than most of Turkish influence. Like their parishioners, members of the local Gagauz clergy are also becoming more mobile. Priests, for example, are now aware of and are in contact with Gagauz from the Balkan countries. These other Gagauz populations on the whole reject ideas of Turkish or Turkic ancestry and Islamic connections and consider themselves full members of the Greek or Bulgarian nations, albeit in some sense also culturally and linguistically distinct. Gagauz priests are also aware of other Turkish speaking Christians from the ex-Ottoman Empire, such as the Pontic and Cappadocian Greeks, who were deported from Turkey to Greece due to their religious affiliation in the 1920s and who are also vehemently anti-Turkish and reject the idea that they are part of a pan-Turkic nation. Now that the historical experience of the other Gagauz populations in the Balkans is free to operate as an influence on the development of Gagauz identity in Moldova, it is unclear to what extent this will undermine the hegemony of the Turkic patrimony that was to a large extent determined by Çakir.

During the course of my time in *Gagauziya* two highly-visible symbols of Turkic affiliation disappeared from public space. The first was the Wolf's Head emblem, a symbol associated with the Turkish extreme rightwing youth movement commonly referred to as the 'Grey Wolves' or *bozkurtlar*, which was removed from the sign welcoming travellers to the capital of *Gagauziya* on the edge of *Komrat*, the regional capital,<sup>161</sup> by the local government, and the other, a large mural map of the Turkic world on the side of a building off the central square in *Komrat*. The removal of these symbols from public view may mark a gradual shift within the Gagauz leadership and intelligentsia away from expressions of affiliation with Turkey and Turkish nationalist politics.

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<sup>160</sup> N. Zeybek, *Türk Olmak*, Ankara: Ocak Yayınları, 2002, p. 256.

<sup>161</sup> See T. Zanet, 'İlk Gagauz Bayraanın Eri da Kalmadı', *Ana Sözü*, 31 July 2004, p.1.

The struggle with the central Moldavian authorities in the early 1990s and memories of harsh treatment and assimilationist policies of the Romanians during the war years mean that on a popular level the strongest pole of gravity remains Russia and Russian culture. The Russian language is still the main literary language in the region and is very strong in public life despite official efforts to promote Romanian in the southern region and to support the development of the Gagauz language. The Orthodox Church also remains staunchly pro-Russian in the Gagauz and Bulgarian regions of the south. Meanwhile in 2004 Bulgaria, in an attempt to shift the gravitational pole of the Bessarabian Gagauz, has given them the right to apply for Bulgarian passports. It seems likely that this was done to help counter Turkish influence in the region and to give Bulgaria more political leverage should the continued existence of the Moldovan state ever come into question.

The intent of the various competing national camps of educators and intellectuals is not lost on the Gagauz themselves. As we saw earlier, Çakir was aware of the nationalist motivations of Greek and Bulgarian scholars in the 1930s and, as one young Gagauz student exclaimed to me in exasperation: 'The Turks want to turn us into Turks, the Bulgarians into Bulgarians, the Russians into Russians, the Moldovans into Romanians and now the Greeks want to try the same. Why don't they just let us be Gagauz!'

The period of history discussed above was characterised by frequent and periodic dislocation from territory and state entities. But this period also marked the move from a state of relative obscurity and anonymity to a political status just short of statehood. From largely illiterate monoglot speakers of a Turkish idiom, the Gagauz of Bessarabia have become proficient speakers of Russian and their own idiom has been elevated to the status of fully-fledged state language. The events of the decades following 1918 clearly helped shape and define the modalities of Gagauz ethnic and national identity today. In as much as ethnicity can be judged to be the relationship between two or more groups and not the property of a particular group, i.e. it takes shape between and not within groups, Gagauz ethnicity and national identity, by coming into contact with new ethnic, cultural and religious 'others' has entered a phase of 'renegotiation'. The relational and situational particularities of the post-Soviet experience are reshaping notions of what it means to be

Gagauz and, as we shall see in the next chapter, also what it means to be Russian Orthodox and Gagauz-speaking.<sup>162</sup>

During the Socialist period, in both the Soviet Union and the rest of the Communist bloc, scholarship often addressed religion indirectly through studies of nationalities and ethnicity.<sup>163</sup> Indeed, as we have seen with the case of Gagauz, who represent an extreme example, due to historical circumstances, ethnicity and religion can become conflated to create a form of identity which is impossible to divide into strictly national, ethnic, linguistic or religious components. This emphasis in Socialist era scholarship has carried over into the studies of religion in the post-Socialist societies of Eastern Europe. Much scholarship now seeks to understand the effect of Soviet nationalities policy on the phenomenon of religious revival.<sup>164</sup> However, as we discussed above, it was not so much Soviet nationalities policy, which sparked the ethno-religious revival amongst the Gagauz, but a movement triggered by nationalist discourses and the instrumentalization of ethnicity in the preceding interwar years, which was subsequently carried over into the Soviet period.

In the next chapter we shall go on to examine how the 'vernacularisation' of religious practice, at the centre of which is the divine liturgy, also began in the same period and how Soviet policy towards the Church and religious practice from the 1940s onward helped shape the field of practice of 'folk religion' and lay religiosity into the post-Socialist era.

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<sup>162</sup> T. Eriksen, 'Ethnic Identity, National Identity and Intergroup Conflict: The significance of personal experiences', in R. Ashmore, L. Jussim and D. Wilder (eds.) *Social Identity, Intergroup Conflict and Conflict Reduction*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001, pp. 42-70.

<sup>163</sup> D. Rogers, 'Introductory Essay: The Anthropology of Religion after Socialism', *Religion, State & Society*, 1: 33 (2005), p. 6.

<sup>164</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 9.

## Chapter 2.

### Liturgy, Language and Vernacularization of Church Orthodoxy

The Divine Liturgy with its scriptural base is at the very heart of Orthodoxy. The daily, weekly and calendrical cycle of worship and practice lends structure to the spiritual life of believers. The liturgy is said to operate by creating a bridge between heaven and earth and offers the faithful 'perfection and self-fulfilment in worship.'<sup>165</sup> In this sense, for Orthodox believers, the geographical centre of their faith, the Church, through the liturgy, also creates a temporal nexus with the divine. In the context of the liturgy the faithful hear the gospel, recite the prayers and sing the hymns that are endorsed by the Church and the clergy and which comprise the primary conduit for the message and teachings of Orthodox Christianity. This model of church, liturgy and people, is how the clergy, in *Gagauziya* as elsewhere, envisage the spiritual life of Russian Orthodoxy functioning under 'normal' circumstances.

Yet there also exist alongside the established expression of Christian worship of the Church other practices whose locus is the home and the family. They too seek to create a link with the divine and often hope to channel celestial attention towards the more mundane terrestrial concerns that affect the lives of believers. Amongst the Gagauz these practises draw on a collection of different texts from those of the liturgy; a varied array of apocryphal *epistoliyas*<sup>166</sup> that are rejected by the official church are utilized by the faithful in the village community and the home.

These two spheres of practice, each with its own set of established texts, seemingly exist in a state of tension, the first embedded in the hierarchy of the Church and its historical doctrine, the other located in the practical needs of the community and arising from pragmatic 'reasoning' of individual believers. The Church does not accept these alternative texts and practices and lay practitioners seem to ignore the protests and sanctions of the ecclesiastic authorities.

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<sup>165</sup> T. Ware, *The Orthodox Church*, London: Penguin, 1997, p. 266.

<sup>166</sup> The Gagauz use the term *epistoliya*, from the Greek ἐπιστολή meaning letter, to refer to a range of apocalypses and apocryphal epistles that have been translated into the Gagauz language. These should not be confused with the epistles of the New Testament, which in Gagauz translations of scripture are called *epistola* or *kiyat*.

Drawn from observations and accounts of lay religious life, and especially how Gagauz believers use and refer to their religious texts, and also from discussions with Gagauz clergy regarding these texts and the liturgy, this chapter and chapter 3 present a picture of the local historical circumstances that determined how these disparate traditions developed in the 20<sup>th</sup> century and the conditions under which they co-exist today.

At the heart of these developments is the process by which the linguistic capital of the Gagauz language increased in the religious sphere during the 20<sup>th</sup> century. To a large extent the changing role and status of the Gagauz language has governed the relationship between the two poles of legitimation for religious practice, namely: the liturgy, scripture and ecclesiastics on the one hand, and the ‘sublunary’<sup>167</sup>, the apocrypha and laity on the other. The institutions of religious practice of both the Church, explored in this chapter, and lay spheres, explored in chapter three, rely on the local vernacular in a variety of circumstances and in the pursuit of a range of aims.

This chapter explores the languages of Gagauz religious practice and how texts came to be translated from Church Slavonic, Romanian, Russian and *Karamanlı* into the Gagauz idiom. The act of translation into the mothertongue is one of primary expression of religious agency and also one of the key factors in understanding the establishment and institutionalisation of Gagauz religious practice.

### 2.1. The Liturgy: Observing the Orthodox Faith.

Frequent participation in the Divine Liturgy constitutes the most important and visible determiner of a devout believer in the community.<sup>168</sup> Those that attend church regularly and who are involved also in the running of the Church are referred to as the *klisecilär* or *klisä insannarı* (church people) and are known in the village and command a certain respect from others. The *klisecilär* express church attendance as both duty, as a member of the Church, and ‘necessity’ in order to secure the well being of their family and the wider community. That said, attitudes towards church attendance vary greatly between the sexes

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<sup>167</sup> I use this term here to refer to the worldly concerns of lay believers in preference to ‘profane’. Although they are not ‘divine’ or ‘sacred’ in origin, they are considered worthy of divine attention and may merit alleviation through the intercession of one or other of the holy personages or saints.

<sup>168</sup> An almost equal regard is reserved for those that strictly observe the Church fasts. Only those parishioners that fast at the prescribed times may partake of communion. This is a visible act, which can be observed by the church-going community.

and across the generations. Many men, especially of the younger generation, see this as a task to be performed by the women of the village:

Oh, no we don't need to go... My mother and grandmother will pray for us. They represent us, they look after the whole family.  
(Young man, Avdarma village, 25.04.06)

An important aspect of this 'looking after the family' is to bring home specially prepared foodstuffs and *ayazma*<sup>169</sup>, that are blessed on holidays and feast days during the liturgy, especially at Easter. Items of clothing, such as socks and kerchiefs, are also sometimes taken to be blessed on feast days and are later used to afford protection from illness and misfortune to the wearer. Attendance by at least one member of the extended family is essential in securing these curatives.

Writing in the 1930s, Mihail Çakir recounts a popular anecdote in which, soon after their colonization of the Budjak, the Gagauz were reported to believe that 'we don't need to go to the church because the priest will pray for everyone.'<sup>170</sup> This was put down to the fact that in their villages of origin in the Balkans for many decades there had been no functioning Church and the Gagauz had become accustomed to fishing and going to market on Sundays.

In all the villages where I attended Church services whilst in *Gagauziya*, the highest proportion of those present in church were the elderly, the *babus* and *dädus* of the community. Often they would bring with them their younger grandchildren who had been assigned to their care. The most noticeable section of the community absent was older male children and men of working age. A very high proportion, perhaps as high as 50% of men of working age, work as migrant labour in Russia, Turkey and Western Europe and as we mentioned in the previous chapter large numbers of women all work in domestic employment in Turkey. Levels of attendance also vary greatly from village to village. When questioned about low numbers, often villagers would explain how these days due to the hardships of making a living people don't have time:

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<sup>169</sup> From the Greek *αγιασμός*, specially blessed holy water that is produced at Easter, the feast of the Theophany and at Church patronal festivals.

<sup>170</sup> Ciachir, 'Reliogizitatea', p. 26.

We are always in a hurry, out and off we go.... The children are left at home, their father is in Moscow working. We believe, everyone believes, but we just don't have time to go to Church.

(Kalak Dona Dmitrievna, Kazayak, 17.11.05.)

My Gagauz informants went to great lengths to stress that Church attendance was not low because people don't believe; everybody was considered to be, and most also regarded themselves firm believers. Having a strong belief in their Orthodox faith does not presuppose participation in church life and services. However, even villagers that attend Church infrequently feel inextricably linked to their Church through the obligations and duties they have for the care of living, through the need for church blessings and curatives, and the souls of the dead, for whom an elaborate cycle of commemorative *pomana* feasts<sup>171</sup>, *koliva*<sup>172</sup> memorial days and especially the feast of *Küçük Paskellä* (Little Easter)<sup>173</sup> must be observed.

On occasion priests would criticise their colleagues in neighbouring villages for not being 'active' or 'inspiring' enough to attract regular church attendance. It was also mooted that Moldovan or Bulgarian priests were not as close to the people and aren't able to motivate Gagauz villagers as can their Gagauz ethnic compatriots. Today most priests serving in Gagauz villages are themselves ethnically Gagauz and usually come from one or other of the neighbouring villages.<sup>174</sup> The villages of *Kazayak*, *Tomay* and *Avdarma*, where

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<sup>171</sup> *Pomana* feasts are held on the 9<sup>th</sup>, 20<sup>th</sup> and 40<sup>th</sup> day, 3<sup>rd</sup>, 6<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> month and 1<sup>st</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> year following the death of a relative.

<sup>172</sup> *Koliva*, from the Greek 'κόλλυβα', made from boiled wheat or rice and decorated with sweets, nuts or pomegranate seeds, is prepared on memorial days for the dead. Following the service itself *koliva* is offered to friends and relatives outside the church. It is then taken to the cemetery where families visit the graves of dead relatives and offer *koliva* to others in the cemetery visiting their deceased family members.

<sup>173</sup> Alternatively known as *Ölülerin Paskellesi* or *Ölülerin günü* (Easter of the Dead or Day of the Dead), this feast takes place in the village cemetery following the Divine Liturgy, which is also said in the cemetery. In the days leading up to *Küçük Paskellä* the graves of dead relatives are cleaned and painted. On the day of the feast itself food and drink offerings as well as small gifts are placed on the graves of close relatives. It is part of popular Orthodox belief that at this time the dead roam the earth and need the sustenance offered by their relatives. The village priest of Tomay in his sermon at *Küçük Paskellä* emphasised that at this time the dead are gathered round Christ and have need of spiritual food in the form of the *slujba*, the liturgy, and that if people pray fervently at this time the dead relatives will feel the strength of their prayers. 'Relatives that live and work abroad may not come home at Easter but always come home for *Küçük Paskellä*, if we haven't seen someone for a long time you can sure they will be here on this day. They have to come for the sake of their parents or grandparents' explained one informant on the day (village of *Tomay*, 01.05.06).

<sup>174</sup> *Gagauziya* comes within the jurisdiction of the Bishopric of Cahul and Comrat, which covers the majority of Southern Moldova. The Gagauz Autonomous Region does not form an independent diocese. However, all the parish priests, together with those of the neighbouring (mainly ethnically Bulgarian) district of Taraclia, fall under the same diocesan subdivision of the *blagochinie*, who is currently the parish priest of the Gagauz village of *Baurçi*, who is ethnic Gagauz. This *blagochinie* employs the Slavonic liturgy in preference to the

most of my time in the field was spent, all have Gagauz priests. The ethnic origin of the parish priest has a direct influence on the Divine Liturgy itself. In the last 20 years, almost from the time the churches were first reopened, in these villages and most others, the Priests have introduced the Gagauz language into the liturgy. They also preach, take confession and address their parishioners in the local idiom. Where this does not happened, most notably in the provincial capital of *Gagauziya*, *Komrat*, the ethnic Moldovan archimandrite is much criticised for the dwindling interest in the Church shown on the part of believers.

The issue of the ethnicity of the local priest and the language of the liturgy is one that was first raised by Moshkoff at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century<sup>175</sup> and is still pertinent today. Amidst concerns amongst both the clergy and parishioners regarding the intelligibility of the service and how to foster greater engagement in the Divine Liturgy, issues have also surfaced in relation to the assertion of Gagauz national aspirations in the Church sphere. In the early 1990s these were initially motivated by fears that Moldova may seek unification with Romania and therefore also reunion with the Romanian Patriarchate, as happened in the interwar years. Later, this was replaced by more general opposition to moves to 'Moldovanize' the new Metropolitan See of Moldova and the desire to maintain intact the Gagauz churches' strong ties with the Patriarch in Moscow and preserve the Church Slavonic liturgical tradition.<sup>176</sup>

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Romanian. In June 2006 there were only five villages without a Gagauz priest and seven priests in all in *Gagauziya*, out of about 30, that were ethnically non-Gagauz, being either Moldovan or Bulgarian. The town of Comrat had a Moldovan Archimandrite, the highest-ranking ecclesiastic in *Gagauziya*. The town of *Çadır-Lunga* has two Gagauz priests, one of whom has the rank of *mitrofor protoierey*, the highest rank for a married priest, and the town of *Vulcanesti* was also served by a Gagauz speaking priest.

<sup>175</sup> V. Moskov, *Gagauzy Benderskago Uezda - Etnograficheskie ocherki i materialy*), Chişinău, 2004, p. 201.

<sup>176</sup> In the immediate post-Soviet era many Orthodox believers petitioned for the Orthodox Church of Moldova to be reunited with the Romanian Patriarchate. A significant group of clergy, including a Bishop, and parishioners from Romanian speaking regions of Moldova decided to establish their own separate Church hierarchy under the name of the Metropolitan Church of Bessarabia, the name under which it had been known during the interwar years. Violence and vandalism ensued against the clergy and church buildings of the new Bessarabian Church. In October 1992 the new Church asked for official recognition from the Moldovan authorities but was refused. The Russian Church, fearing a mass exodus from the Orthodox Church of Moldova to the Bessarabian Church, hastily upgraded their Church in Chişinău to the status of Metropolitan Church, giving it a high degree of autonomy. On December 20<sup>th</sup> 1992 the Romanian Orthodox Church received the Bessarabian Church back into the fold precipitating a crisis of relations between the Romanian and Russian Orthodox Churches that has yet to be fully resolved. Disputes continue to this day at the parish level also between clergy and supporters of the two Churches over Church property and access to Church buildings. With the breakaway of a significant number of Moldovan parishes, in the region of 50, to the Bessarabian Church, the leadership in Transnistria requested their own bishop as a step towards Church autonomy and at the same time calls were made to establish a Gagauz bishopric in *Komrat*. The policies and actions of both the Russian and Romanian Churches over Moldova are linked to the broader



## 2.2. The Three Languages of Gagauz Orthodoxy

Since the late 19<sup>th</sup> century (and possibly earlier) concerns over the language, or languages, used in the Gagauz liturgy have been raised by both the clergy and lay believers. Issues of 'intelligibility' of the liturgy and 'engagement' in Church practice on the part of lay believers, that were first raised over a century ago, are amongst the main factors that have shaped the development of the Orthodox Church in post-communist *Gagauziya*. Over the past 200 years the liturgical language has shifted in emphasis several times between Church Slavonic, Romanian and Gagauzian, and has restricted the ability of successive generations of Orthodox Christian Gagauz to understand the liturgy and the message of the Church. The problem of 'liturgical literacy'<sup>177</sup> is compounded by the politically motivated and symbolically emotive switching that took place for both the Moldovan and Gagauz languages between the Cyrillic alphabet, based on Russian and associated with Russian Imperial and Soviet power, and Latin scripts, based on the Romanian alphabet in the case of Moldovan, and associated with the Romanian state and nation, and both the Romanian and Turkish alphabets in the case of the Gagauz language.<sup>178</sup>

The Gagauz have belonged to the Russian Orthodox Church for the greater part of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, apart from two brief interludes, the first following the Crimean War, when three southern *raions* were ceded to Romania, and the second between the two World Wars, when the whole of Bessarabia was incorporated into Greater Romania. During these periods the majority of the Gagauz fell under the jurisdiction of Romanian ecclesiastical authorities, firstly the Moldavian Metropolitan Church and then the

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geopolitical interests of their titular nations. For an overview of the Romanian perspective see N. Dima, 'Politics and Religion in Moldova: A Case Study', *Mankind Quarterly*, 3:34 (1994), pp. 175-194. On the role of the Russian Church in the region in the post-Soviet era see J. Dunlop, 'The Russian Orthodox Church as an "Empire-Saving" Institution', in M. Bourdeaux (ed.), *The Politics of Religion in Russia and the New States of Eurasia, The International Politics of Eurasia Vol. 3*, New York and London: M. E. Sharpe, 1995, pp. 15-40.

<sup>177</sup> A. Rosowsky uses this term in his article exploring the knowledge and use of Qur'anic or Classical Arabic amongst UK Muslims as opposed to the various vernacular languages of these communities such as Urdu. This situation in many ways can be compared with the use and knowledge of the Slavonic Liturgy (and/or Romanian) in Gagauziya and community's own language, Gagauz. See. A. Rosowsky, 'The role of liturgical literacy in UK Muslim communities', in T. Omoniyi and J. Fishman (eds.), *Explorations in the Sociology of Language and Religion*, Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2006, pp. 309-324.

<sup>178</sup> For an overview of the politics of language policy and alphabets in Moldova in the Soviet period see King, *The Moldovans*, pp. 63-88 and D. Dyer, *The Romanian Dialect of Moldova*, New York: The Edwin Mellen Press Ltd, 1999.

Romanian Patriarchate.<sup>179</sup> The liturgical language of the Russian Church was, and still is to a large extent, Old Church Slavonic, a language devised by the Byzantine Greek monks Cyril and Methodius in their mission to convert the Slavic peoples of Central and Eastern Europe, which they based on the Macedonian dialect spoken by the Slavs of Thessalonica. Prior to their migration to the Budjak steppe the Gagauz, as we noted earlier, were part of the Patriarchate of Constantinople and the evidence suggests were using Greek as their liturgical language, although some part of the population, having lived alongside Bulgarians, may have also been familiar with the Slavonic rite.

We know little about the religious lives of the Gagauz colonists at the time of settlement and during the early colonial period. Radova, referencing a work by P. Koeppen, refers to settlers with Turkic, and therefore by default Gagauz, names arriving with Greek clergy in the Budjak. Koeppen also identifies the Gagauz of 'Greek faith' as 'hasyl Gagauz', meaning true or real Gagauz, whom commentators understand to be the Gagauz of the coastal region of Dobrudja.<sup>180</sup> The distinction between the Gagauz of the coast and the Varna region, who are linguistically and culturally considered to be closer to Greeks, and those of the hinterland, who fall within the cultural orbit of the Slav Bulgarian population, is one that often recurs in the scholarship and is linked to the competing national claims over the 'true' ethnic identity and ethno-genesis of the Gagauz that we explored in chapter one.<sup>181</sup>

Another source that provides some clues about the priesthood that served the Gagauz community in the early years of settlement comes from a history of the Çakir dynasty of priests.<sup>182</sup> The relative of Mihail Çakir, whom we discussed in connection with

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<sup>179</sup> Founded in 1925 the Romanian Patriarchate was formerly headed by a Primate Metropolitan bishop and had been formed from the Metropolitan Sees of Walachia and Moldavia in 1885 when its autocephalous status was recognised by the Ecumenical Patriarch.

<sup>180</sup> Gagauz of the coastal region of Dobrudja in later decades indeed seem to have been Grecophile in terms of Church practice. In the 1860s and 70s, and up until as late as 1906, the Gagauz of Dobrudja, alongside the urban Greeks of Varna, resisted attempts by the Bulgarian Clergy to assert authority within the Church in and around the city. This was a region where historically the Bulgarian Patriarchate had never held sway. See S. Ashley, 'Minority Populations and the Nationalist Process in the Bulgarian Lands (1821-1876)', in L. Collins (ed.), *Proceedings of the Anglo-Bulgarian Symposium, Vol. I*, London: School of Slavonic and East European Studies, 1985, pp. 54-55.

<sup>181</sup> With regard to the the Greek and Bulgarian elements in Gagauz lexicology see L. Pokrovskaya, 'Musulmanskiye Elementi v Sisteme Hristianskoy Religioznoy Terminologii Gagauzov', *Sovetskaya Etnografiya*, 1 (1974), pp. 139-144.

<sup>182</sup> The Gagauz historian Stepan Bulgar refers to a work by Dimitriy Çakir entitled '*Biograficheski ocherk roda i familia Çakir*', dated 1899, which is the source for much of the early information on the Çakir family

the Gagauz national movement in chapter 1, Zahariy was born in *Ploiești* in Moldavia sometime in the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. His parents had moved there from *Şabla*, in what was then Ottoman Dobrudja. In 1790 the Çakir family together with other Gagauz moved to Bessarabia, onto the land of a noble called *Balş*. In 1802 Zahariy took holy orders and became the priest of the village of *Çadir*. However, in 1812 when free land was offered by the Russian colonial administration on the newly annexed territory of Bessarabia, Zahariy and his parishioners founded the new settlement of *Çadir-Lunga* on the territory of today's *Gagauziya*. We know from the family history of the Çakir clan therefore that ethnically Gagauz priests were also amongst the clergy in the colonial settlements. We also know from the same source that at this time Zahariy Çakir read the liturgy in Romanian. Indeed, in the early decades of Russian rule, thanks largely to the activities of the head of the newly created Chişinău Eparchy, Archbishop Gavril Banulescu Bodoni, Romanian culture and language were supported by the Orthodox Church.<sup>183</sup>

In the environment of their new home, which was settled almost solely by migrants like themselves from the Balkans and who spoke a variety of languages,<sup>184</sup> they had little contact with Russian speakers, and knowledge of Russian amongst the Gagauz was undoubtedly rare. We have an early indication of the Gagauz's lack of knowledge of Russian from a 19<sup>th</sup> century report referred to by Charles Upton Clark. He states that 'We find a priest named Muranevitch complaining to the consistory that the peasants of Comrat [today the capital town of *Gagauziya*] did not understand his preaching in Russian, and understood Roumanian better, although they are Bulgarians (*Gagaoutz*) and talk Turkish'.<sup>185</sup> The Russian ethnographer V. A. Moshkov, who spent several years at the close of the 19<sup>th</sup> century collecting ethnographic material amongst the Gagauz, writing in 1900, states, 'The weakest element of Gagauz religious life is that the Church religious service is conducted in unknown languages, in Old Church Slavonic and Moldavian'.<sup>186</sup> Moshkov goes on to give us our first indication that the Gagauz themselves had a desire for

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that Bulgar utilizes in his biography of Mihail Çakir. See S. Bulgar, 'Mihail Çakirin Biyografiyasi', in Çakir, *Gagauzlar*, pp. 6-52.

<sup>183</sup> Jewsbury, *The Russian Annexation*, p. 88.

<sup>184</sup> In large parts of the Eastern Balkans, from where the Bulgarians, Albanians, Gagauz and other nationalities migrated to the Budjak, Turkish operated as a lingua franca and may even have continued to do so amongst the colonists in the early years of the settlement in the Budjak.

<sup>185</sup> C. Clark, *Bessarabia: Russia and Roumania on the Black Sea*, New York: Dodd, Mead & Company, 1927, p. 103.

<sup>186</sup> Quoted in S. Bulgar, *Stranitsy Istorii i Literatury gagauzov XIX-nach. XX vv.*, Kishinov: Pontus, 2005, p. 10.

the Church service to be made more intelligible to them. He came across examples of *Karamanlı* Turkish language Christian literature in Gagauz homes and reports it being used in some Church services. He explains that some priests encouraged the use of this literature to improve the ability of their parishioners to take part in the service and also remarks at their delight on hearing the Lord's Prayer and the Symbol of the Faith recited in *Karamanlı*.<sup>187</sup>

*Karamanlı*, also known as *Karamanlidika*, is the name given to Turkish language literature written with Greek characters published from the early 18th through to the 20<sup>th</sup> century in Istanbul and other centres around Europe, including Odessa and the Danube Principalities of Moldavia and Wallachia, to satisfy the desire of Turkish speaking Orthodox Christians of Anatolia and Istanbul for literature in their mother tongue.<sup>188</sup> The language of this literature, despite its distinct name, conforms very largely with the standard literary Ottoman Turkish of the period of publication, and is therefore generally not considered to be a separate language or even a dialect discrete from the Anatolian Turkish of the Muslim majority. However, it is quite different from the spoken Turkish idiom that is used by the Gagauz and was only partly intelligible to Gagauz readers.<sup>189</sup> In his ethnographic monograph of the Gagauz, Moshkoff states in reference to the *Karamanlis*,

They print their own books in Turkish using Greek letters and these books, which they bring with them to sell in Bessarabia, attract the interest of the Gagauz. *Karamanlis* price their books very highly and for this reason rarely can the Gagauz afford to buy them but for those that have them they are worth their weight in gold.<sup>190</sup>

According to Russian linguist Lyudmila Pokrovskaya, this literature had a significant influence on Gagauz religious terminology and was the source of all the Arabic and

<sup>187</sup> From V. Moshkov, *Gagauzy Benderskogo Uezda (Etnograficheskoe obozrenie)*, Moscow, 1900, p. 42, quoted in Bulgar, 'Stranitsy Istorii', 2005, p. 5. Ivanova, in a brief discussion of language use amongst the Gagauz of Varna, cites some evidence to suggest that the Gagauz in Bulgaria had access to *Karamanli* religious literature in the pre-Besarabian period. See S. Ivanova, 'Varna during the Late Middle Ages – Regional versus National History', *Études Balkaniques*, 2 (2004), pp. 129-130.

<sup>188</sup> For a full survey of the *karamanli* literature see. E. Balta, 'Périodisation et typologie de la production des livres karamanli' in F. Hitzel (ed.), *Livres et lecture dans le monde ottoman, Revue des mondes musulmans et de la Méditerranée*, no. 87-88 (1999), pp. 251-75. On the publication of Karamanli literature in the Romanian principalities see D. Simonescu, 'Impression de Livres Arabes et Karamanlis en Valachie et en Moldavie au XVIII<sup>e</sup> Siècle', *Studia et Acta Orientalia*, V-VI (1967), pp. 49-75.

<sup>189</sup> Pokrovskaya, 'Musulmanskie elementi', p. 142-143.

<sup>190</sup> From Moshkoff, 'Gagauzy Benderskogo Uezda', 1900, p. 42, quoted in Bulgar, *Stranitsy Istorii*, 2005, p. 5.

Persian religious terms that today constitute about one third of the religious terminology of the modern Gagauz idiom.<sup>191</sup> However, we know from the reports of Moshkov that *karamanlı* literature did not play a significant part in the liturgical life of the Church and that the books themselves, as well as those that were able to read them, were rare.

On the other hand what is clear is that some of the religious themes that appear in the *Karamanlı* literature became very popular amongst the Gagauz and feature strongly in their religious folklore. The biblical narratives of 'Josef the son of Jacob', 'Sacrifice of Isaac', as well as the popular verse about 'Aleksius the Man of God', which appear in the *Karamanlı* literature of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, all found their way into Gagauz religious folk songs that are still widely known today.<sup>192</sup> A few rare examples of *Karamanlı* literature can still be found in *Gagauziya* in the possession of parish priests, villagers and at the local history museum in the village of *Beşalma*.<sup>193</sup> Despite the fact that *Karamanlı* books had a limited circulation amongst the Gagauz of Bessarabia this literature nevertheless appears to have influenced local religious life and also acted as an inspiration and source of linguistic material for the next stage in the development of a distinct Gagauz liturgy.<sup>194</sup>

Apart from this very limited use of *Karamanlı*, Church Slavonic remained the principal language of the liturgy until the early years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, when the first translations of liturgical texts were made directly into the Gagauz language itself. This initiative came surprisingly late given the earlier efforts of the Russian Orthodox Church to translate the liturgy into other Turkic and Siberian languages of the empire.<sup>195</sup> In the case of these other peoples this was done in order to assist the Church's efforts at conversion; of

<sup>191</sup> See Pokrovskaya, 'Musulmanskiye elementi', pp. 139-144.

<sup>192</sup> For a brief account of these themes as they appear in the religious folk songs of the Gagauz see E. Kvilinkova, *Moldova Gagauzların Halk Türküleri*, Chişinău: Pontus, 2003.

<sup>193</sup> The author also discovered a fragment of a handwritten copy of 'Aleksios the Man of God', which had been transcribed into Cyrillic dating from the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The text appears to be a direct copy of a *Karamanlı* original and maintains its *Karamanlı* linguistic features (tetradka of Fyodor Fyodorovich Stoykov, village of *Tomay*).

<sup>194</sup> Bulgar, *Stranitsy Istorii*, p. 15.

<sup>195</sup> In 1812 the Imperial Russian Bible society had been founded in association with the British and Foreign Bible Society with the aim of making the scriptures available in all the various languages of the empire but work on translating into Turkic and Siberian languages had begun even earlier. For example a catechism appeared in the Tartar language as early as 1803, see A. Rorlich, *The Volga Tartars: A Profile of National Resilience*, Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1986, p. 44, and the first religious books in the Sakha (Yakut) language were printed in 1812, see A. Burtsev, 'The Influence of Church Translations on Subsequent Sakha (Yakut) Literature', *Papers presented at symposia held at Oxford University and at the University of Edinburgh in April 1997 on the work of St Innocent Veniaminov in the Russian Far East and Alaska*, Orthodox Research Institute, [http://www.Orthodoxresearchinstitute.org/articles/misc/burtsev\\_church\\_translations.htm](http://www.Orthodoxresearchinstitute.org/articles/misc/burtsev_church_translations.htm) [accessed on 5<sup>th</sup> July 2008].

course, in relation to the Gagauz, this was not the primary motive as the Gagauz were already a community established in the Orthodox faith.

Three decades before the publication of his 'History of the Gagauz of Bessarabia' that we discussed in chapter 1, Mihail Çakir embarked on an ambitious project to translate the Orthodox Christian canon into the language of his people. As president of the 'Special Commission for Translation and Education of the Gagauz of Bessarabia' founded in 1906 in the provincial capital Chişinău, he was more or less single-handedly responsible for the translation of all the essential liturgical texts and extracts from scripture into the Gagauz language.<sup>196</sup> Çakir was born in 1861 in *Çadır-Lunga*, the town his Grandfather Zahariy had helped to found at the time of the colonization, and because of his appreciation, as one biographer put it, of the 'just value of the role of the Moldavian, Russian and Gagauz languages in southern Bessarabia',<sup>197</sup> began his translation work immediately upon finishing seminary. In 1907 the Holy Synod of Archbishop Vladimir of Chişinău gave permission for his first translation works to be printed and distributed.<sup>198</sup>

Writing in 1934 in the introduction to the reprint of his 1909 translation to the Gospel of Matthew Çakir gives an insight into his motivations for having undertaken the mammoth task of translating Holy Scripture into the Gagauz language.

It is because our ancestors, fathers, mothers, who didn't know how to read, went to the monasteries and requested that the monks should read the advice of the New Testament and listened with all their soul. What joy for the Gagauz of today who know how to read! What joy for the Gagauz of today that can read for themselves from the Holy Gospel, God's words in the Gagauz language; and also find new help in difficulty and times of trouble.<sup>199</sup>

A definitive bibliography of the extensive translations of religious texts that Çakir published has yet to be produced. However, they include the following (in the various sources they appear under slightly different titles): 'The History of the Old and New Testaments', 'History of the Church', 'Short Prayer Book', 'The Gospel', 'The Psalter', 'The Acathists of the Mother of God', 'Prayer Book for the Gagauz', 'Te Deum', and 'The

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<sup>196</sup> I. Şpac, 'Un credincios al Basarabiei', *Luminatorul*, Nr. 5, (2001), p. 43.

<sup>197</sup> Ibid., p. 43.

<sup>198</sup> Ciachir, *Gagauzlar*, p. 93.

<sup>199</sup> 'Evangeliei ocueadjac Gagauzlara nasaat sioziu' reprinted in S. Bulgar, *Stranitsy Istorii*, p. 272.

Hours'.<sup>200</sup> Çakir was also responsible for the publication of the Gagauz language Orthodox newspaper *Hakikatın Sesi* (The Voice of Truth), which appeared from about 1907 into the 1930s and gives us an important insight into the religious and political ideas that occupied Çakir at the time.<sup>201</sup> Today, due to his efforts to create a Gagauz liturgical language and his prolific translation work, Mihail Çakir is referred to as the 'Cyril and Methodius' of Gagauz Orthodoxy and is honoured annually in Schools and Colleges around *Gagauziya*. Significantly, in 2001, with the aid of some Greeks and the Gagauz community in Greece, Çakir's *Kısa Dua Kitabı* (Short Prayer Book) was republished. The edition combines both the modern Gagauz Latin orthography and the Cyrillic orthography of the original 1908 edition (most Gagauz still find it easier to read the Cyrillic script) and was distributed freely in Churches around *Gagauziya*, making Çakir's work widely available for the first time in 70 years. None of Çakir's other translations of religious texts have been republished for popular consumption.<sup>202</sup>

The idiom that Çakir used for his translations is suffused with many Arabic and Persian terms and his phraseology seems to betray the use of Turkish and possibly *karamanlı* sources.<sup>203</sup> Çakir's linguistic preference in his translations for Turkish sources is reflected in the decades that followed in his politics also. Following the First World War, Bessarabia, as well as southern Dobrudja, was incorporated into Greater Romania, which had an interest in steering the Gagauz away from their pro-Russian and pro-Bulgarian sympathies towards a sponsor nation the Romanian government considered more convivial, Kemalist Turkey. In the inter-war period Turkey and Turkish intellectuals showed great interest in the Turkic peoples of the Soviet Union and the neighbouring countries. Their Pan-Turkist ideology was based on the desire to see all Turkic speaking peoples of the world united into one great civilisation. The aid that Turkey began to offer to the Turks and Tartars of Romanian Dobrudja in the sphere of education and culture was

<sup>200</sup> Bibliographical details of Çakir's translations of religious texts appear in Appendix 1. Other works by the translation committee remained unpublished. I came across some of these hitherto unknown translations in the village of *Tomay* in a notebook dating from 1911 belonging to an elderly villager.

<sup>201</sup> None of the extant copies of *Hakikatın Sesi* that were available to me are dated. Numbers 6, 14 and 15 of the journal employ the Cyrillic alphabet, whereas number 25 uses the Romanian-based Latin script that Çakir employed in the 1930s. The earlier editions were published by Tipographia Eparhială "Cartea Românească" whereas number 25 was published through Tipografia Uniunii Clericilor Ortodocși din Basarabia. Full bibliographical details of these editions appear in Appendix 1.

<sup>202</sup> There have been some local Church initiatives to copy and distribute Çakir's works. My copy of Çakir's *Eni baalantının Ayözları İstoriyası* was reprinted by Eyisözlük Monastırın "Örtmesi Dzhumledyanayöz Allahıduuduranın", Goloseevo: Kiev, 2000.

<sup>203</sup> Bulgar, *Stranitsy Istoriï*, p. 15.

also extended to the Gagauz. For the secular Turkish government and the pan-Turkic activists of the 1920s and 30s the Christian religion of the Gagauz constituted no object to close brotherly ties.

By the 1930s Çakır had formed a close connection with Hamdulla Suphi Tanrıöver, the Turkish ambassador to Romania, and they travelled to Gagauz villages together to meet children that would later be sent on Turkish state scholarships to study in Istanbul.<sup>204</sup> At this time school teachers trained in the newly opened Muslim *medrese* in *Mecediye* (Medgidia) in Romania (but funded by Turkey) were sent to a number of Gagauz villages to teach Turkish and, according one Gagauz historian, 'to spread the pan-Turkic ideology'.<sup>205</sup>

News of Çakır's translation of the liturgy and his 'History of the Gagauz' also reached Turkey and was reported in the Istanbul press where he was praised for his pan-Turkist credentials in the newspaper *Vakit*, which reported in 1943:

There is a 73 year old priest in Bessarabia who not only produced books in Turkish for the Gagauz people but who pays with his own money for their publication and works himself to distribute them; he worked like an apostle.<sup>206</sup>

The Turkish government at the time was also keen to foster a close relationship between the Gagauz and Turkey's own tiny Turkish speaking Orthodox minority, which under the nationalist hierarch *Papa Eftimi* had broken away from the authority of the Ecumenical Patriarch to form the Independent Turkish Orthodox Church. The Turkish Orthodox Church hoped that the Gagauz could be persuaded to accept the Turkish Orthodox Patriarch as head of their Church as a way of undermining the authority of the Ecumenical Patriarch in Constantinople and there were also plans, again instigated by Tanrıöver, to settle some Gagauz in the Marmara region of Turkey.<sup>207</sup> Given the intentions of the Antonescu regime in Romania to ethnically cleanse Bessarabia, the removal of part of the Gagauz population to Turkey was a very real prospect.

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<sup>204</sup> For a full survey of Hamdulla Suphi Tanrıöver's activities amongst the Gagauz see Anzerlioğlu, Y., 'Bükreş Büyükelçisi Hamdullah Suphi ve Gagauz Türkleri', *Bilig*, 39 (2006), pp. 31-51.

<sup>205</sup> S. Bulgar, 'Türkiye' Gelen 1934-1940-cı Yıllarda Gagauz Ürenicileri', *Sabaa Yıldızı*, No. 13, 2000, p. 17. In 1935 Turkish language classes taught by Turkish teachers were introduced into schools in the Gagauz settlements of *Komrat*, *Çadır-Lunga*, *Kubey* and *Kongaz*. See Anzerlioğlu, 'Bükreş Büyükelçisi', p. 45.

<sup>206</sup> Bulgar, 'Türkiye' Gelen', p. 18.

<sup>207</sup> F. Tevetoğlu, *Hamdullah Suphi Tanrıöver: hayatı ve eserleri*, Ankara: Sevinç, 1986, pp. 206-210.



The final linguistic form of the Gagauz liturgy, which Çakir began to translate in the early years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, certainly owes much more to the influence of *Karamanlı* literature than to the later influence of the literary Turkish of the interwar years. Despite these early efforts by Çakir to introduce the Gagauz language into the *slujba* in the interwar years, it did not become a common feature in Gagauz villages. During this period it was the Romanian language that began wholesale to replace Church Slavonic in the Church and Liturgy.

Romanian had gradually become the primary liturgical language of the two Danubian principalities of Wallachia and Moldavia during the 18<sup>th</sup> century, replacing Church Slavonic.<sup>208</sup> In the early decades of Gagauz colonisation, as we saw in the case of the Çakir family in *Çadır-Lunga*, the Romanian liturgy was used. Indeed, some settlements may even have experienced a continuity of liturgical practice at least partly in Romanian throughout much the imperial period.<sup>209</sup> However, it was in the inter-war period when the whole of Bessarabia and the Budjak were incorporated into Greater Romania that Romanian became, for the first time, the prime medium of the liturgy for the whole of the Gagauz faithful. The Romanian authorities, including the Church, were determined to reverse the more than century-long Russian influence on a territory that Romanians considered to be an integral part of the historical Romanian state.

Across Bessarabia the use of the Romanian language in the Orthodox Church had been in decline especially since the Russification campaign of Archbishop Pavel (1871-1882).<sup>210</sup> By 1918, when ethnic Romanians were once more at the helm of the Bessarabian Church,<sup>211</sup> many priests were unable to preach in Romanian; a situation which the new church authorities were keen to rectify. The Romanianization of the Bessarabian Church included the opening of a new theology faculty in Chişinău, attached to Iaşi (Jassy) University in Romania, and the importation of a host of university professors from

<sup>208</sup> For a history of the use of Romanian as a liturgical language see I. Bianu, *Despre introducerea limbii româneşti în biserica românilor*, Bucharest, 1904.

<sup>209</sup> In the three *raions* that were ceded back to the Moldavian Principality in 1856 following the Crimean War, Romanian was the primary liturgical language as the region was brought back under the authority of the Primate Metropolitan of Moldavia (see map 1, page 16).

<sup>210</sup> Livezeanu, *Cultural Politics*, p. 95.

<sup>211</sup> The first Archbishop of Chişinău to be appointed by the Romanian Holy Synod was Nicodim Munteanu, previously of the Eparchy of Huşi just over the river Prut in Romanian Moldavia. He was followed in 1919 by Gurie Grosu, a native of Transylvania, who remained in post until 1936 (in 1928 the Archbishop of Chişinău was raised to the rank of Metropolitan Bishop. Following the suspension of Grosu by the Holy Synod in November 1936 a series of deputies took over until 1944. None of the senior hierarchs in this period were native to Bessarabia. See Păcurariu, *Bessarabia*, p. 111.

Romania to teach there, including the Orthodoxist ideologue Nichifor Crainic mentioned in the previous chapter. Two new seminaries were also opened in the province with the result, according to one Romanian church historian, of 'forming a new generation of priests bred in the Romanian spirit, who worked with great effect next to the old generation formed in the Russian period. They acted gradually to remove the Russian practices from worship and for the return of the old authentic Romanian tradition'.<sup>212</sup>

By the 1930s many Gagauz villages had ethnic Moldovan Romanian-speaking priests, who according to the accounts of my elderly informants, were extremely zealous in their attempts to promote the use of Romanian in the Church and local schools. Despite the often very negative views held by the older generations regarding this interregnum in Russian rule, in the sphere of religious life certainly some Gagauz believers appear to have warmed to their new sacred language and liturgy. I encountered several elderly informants who expressed a liking, and even a preference, for the Romanian liturgy and a sense of pride that they could still converse in Romanian; indeed many of this generation still pray in Romanian, a fact that will be considered in more depth in chapter four.

During this interwar period two new challenges appeared on the horizon for the Orthodox Church in Bessarabia, the threat of Bolshevism emanating from over the border in Soviet Ukraine, and the missionary activities of a number of Protestant 'sects'. We have already mentioned the effect that agitation from Soviet agents and socialist inspired uprisings were having on ethnic relations in Bessarabia (see page 51) but the anti-Romanian and anti-religious rhetoric of the Soviet Union was also threatening to the Romanian Orthodox Church. By 1930 there were approximately 19,200 members of religious sects, as they were designated; of these 14,997 were Baptists, who were especially active in the south, and 1,540 were Adventists.<sup>213</sup> These two enemies of Orthodoxy, the communist and the *sectanți* were also perceived by Çakir to be the most serious threats to the Gagauz people. As early as 1934 Ernest Max Hoppe reported in the journal 'Moslem World' that there were communities of the 'Evangelical faith' amongst the Gagauz who have 'acquired a missionary interest for work amongst the Mohammedans'.<sup>214</sup> According to Çakir these external threats were the result of the new-

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<sup>212</sup> Păcurariu, *Basarabia*, p. 113.

<sup>213</sup> Ibid., p. 115.

<sup>214</sup> E. Hoppe, 'The Turkish Christian Gagauz', *The Moslem World*, 24 (1934), p. 280.

found 'liberality' that resulted from, amongst other things, the Russian revolution. In the Gagauz language newspaper *Hakikatın Sesi* and in his other works from the period he ceaselessly addresses these two threats.

Some Gagauz have begun shamelessly to abandon the religion of their mothers' and fathers', to discard the true faith of Orthodox Christianity, like the Jew, to sell and discard the cross of Christ, and to become Baptists, Adventists, and join other sects...Amongst the foolish Gagauz will be found such stupid men who shamelessly become atheist communists, godless wolves.<sup>215</sup>

For Çakir these threats and the inevitable moral decay that would ensue are explicitly linked and his formulations express how the defence of Orthodoxy is inseparable and indivisible from defence of the ethnic nation. Çakir was translating, publishing and disseminating his Gagauz language liturgical texts and addressing the Gagauz faithful through *Hakikatın Sesi* as a means of defending both Gagauz Orthodoxy and Gagauz nationhood; the two were indissoluble. At this point we should not forget that for the Romanian nation too this synthesis of the ethnic nation with Orthodox spirituality was the guiding principle behind defining the nation.

In the post-Soviet era, when once again issues surrounding the use of the Gagauz language in the liturgy and religious life resurfaced, Gagauz clergy in the Orthodox Church found themselves facing the same adversaries in the form of Baptist and Adventist missionaries as they had in the 1930s.

The return of Soviet rule in Bessarabia in 1944 brought with it a period of extreme repression of the Moldovan Church. Much of the Romanian or Romanophile Moldovan clergy fled into exile to Romania, including many of the Çakir clan; those that did not faced arrest, deportation and murder at the hands of Stalin's regime.<sup>216</sup> Once again the Slavonic rite was in the ascendancy. However, in the decades following, as the Soviet authorities closed more and more churches and monasteries – by 1988 only 193 of an original 1100-plus churches remained open<sup>217</sup> – and openly punished those that attended church services, the language and nationality of the priest became immaterial as simply

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<sup>215</sup> Çakir, *Gagauzlar*, p. 79.

<sup>216</sup> Dima, 'Politics and Religion', p. 184.

<sup>217</sup> Ibid. p. 184.

having access to the church and clergy to fulfil the most basic rituals of baptism and burial became increasingly difficult.

The old women would go secretly sometimes at night. Often grandparents would take the young children to be baptised in Bolgrad [a town in Ukraine 40 kilometres away from the informants home village of Kazayak] without even their parents knowing about it. That way the parents would not be in danger of losing their jobs. Sometimes the parents only found out years later that their child had been baptised.

(Varban Zina Dmitrievna, Kazayak, 05.03.06).

From 1806 to the present day the language of the liturgy and of the Church has shifted several times adjusting to the changing national political and ecclesiastical climate. In the first century following the major period of migration to the region – roughly 1806-1918 - the Slavonic liturgy and Russian-speaking priesthood were gradually introduced and replaced any Greek priests that accompanied the colonists from the Balkans and local Moldavian priests using the Romanian liturgy.<sup>218</sup> At the end of this period the first attempts were made to introduce the Gagauz language into the liturgy. The Romanian Church installed Romanian as the official Church language from 1918 until 1944 (with just a short break during the Soviet reoccupation of 1940-41). The end of the war brought a return of the Slavonic Liturgy soon followed by mass closures of Churches from the 1950s. Finally, with the advent of Glasnost and Perestroika in the late 1980s churches began to re-open and efforts were made to introduce Gagauz once again into the liturgy and Church life. Within the living memory of many older informants the language of the liturgy has switched between Slavonic and Romanian as many as four times.

### 2.3 Gagauz Language, Liturgy and Scripture in the post-Soviet Era

Inevitably, the history of language and liturgical practice in the Orthodox Church has affected contemporary attitudes and practices amongst the Gagauz. Remarkably, all three liturgical languages maintain a place, to a greater or lesser degree, in Gagauz village

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<sup>218</sup> There is some evidence to suggest that Greek priests accompanied the Gagauz colonists to the Budjak. See Radova, 'Ethnic Identification', p. 64. Manov also refers to this process. See Manov, 'Gagauzlar', p. 64.

services. In all the villages inhabited by Gagauz, the Slavonic rite predominates. However, in many, depending on the nationality of the priest, prayers, certain songs, readings from the gospels, elements of the liturgy, and sermons are often included in the Gagauz language and in all villages I visited the priests have copies of Çakir's version of the Liturgy and Psalter for use in services. The extent to which Gagauz is employed is entirely at the discretion of the local priest and varies tremendously from village to village.

Romanian too still fulfils a minor role in church services; *Tatul Nostru* (Our Father), the *Rugăciunile începutoare*, or opening prayers,<sup>219</sup> and the refrain *Doamne miluiește* (Lord have mercy) can be heard in most church services. Often 'Our Father' and certain other prayers and refrains will be said in three languages, first Russian, then Romanian and finally Gagauz.

Each of the three liturgical languages carries with it a historically charged symbolic meaning for Gagauz believers. These were often expressed in discussions I had about how villagers 'enjoyed' or 'connected' with the liturgy in different languages. Their responses were often coloured by their own personal experience; those of their particular generation of believers, and also by a wider communally-held collective memory of Gagauz history and the place of Orthodoxy within it.

The strong attachment of both the clergy and the lay practitioners to use of Slavonic and Russian is expressed in terms of 'gratitude' towards 'Holy Russia' and the Tsar; the Gagauz preserve the historical memory of fleeing from the Ottomans and having been granted their land by Imperial Russia. The Russian church is also perceived as the defender of Orthodoxy and the champion of 'true doctrine', especially in its adherence to the Julian calendar. I witnessed an expression of this extraordinary loyalty and sense of belonging to the Russian Church and Russia, which is usually experienced only amongst ethnic Russians and Orthodox groups closely aligned with the Russian Federation, at the occasion of the arrival in *Komrat* of the icon of the *Svyatyi Tsaryu-mucheniche* (Holy Tsar-Martyr) Nicholas. The icon, which is a important object of devotion for Russian émigrés and

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<sup>219</sup> The short 'opening prayers' are some of the oldest and most common in the Orthodox tradition. See Preot prof. Stelian Ionașcu (ed.), *Cartea de Rugăciuni a Poporului Român*, București: Editura Privirea, 2004, pp. 13-16.

nationalists alike, toured the whole of *Gagauziya* drawing large numbers of people who greeted it with gasps of wonder and exclamations of delight.<sup>220</sup>

In addition to this there is also the added attraction of Russian in the secular sphere where it is regarded as the language of high culture and learning. During the Soviet period a mastery of Russian was essential for personal advancement. Today, through their knowledge of the Russian language, the Gagauz have a window on the world via the Russian media and access to the Russian labour market at a time of severe economic depression in Moldova.

All this is in stark contrast to the response that the Romanian language often provokes, for it carries with it far more negative connotations. The older generation remember the Greater Romania period between the World Wars as one of repression accompanied by furious attempts to Romanianize the population. I heard many accounts of beatings at the hands of Romanian schoolteachers: 'In those days people feared their parents, but we feared the Romanian school teacher more!'<sup>221</sup>

The Romanian Church's use of the reformed Julian calendar is considered by many devout Gagauz Orthodox to be verging on heresy. Moreover, the presence of Romanian priests during the inter-war period is said to have brought with it a corrupted and debased form of Orthodoxy. One Gagauz priest blamed the spread of all apocryphal texts, pseudo-religious healing practices and superstition on their pernicious influence: 'What they brought with them, that was not Orthodoxy! The Gagauz had a pure faith before they came along.' As we shall see in the chapters that follow, it is precisely these aspects of Gagauz religious practice that this priest highlights as 'un-Gagauz' and counter to Orthodox teachings that are the principal areas of religious practice that are conducted in the local Gagauz vernacular and, we shall argue shortly, comprise the primary field of practice in which Gagauz lay religious agency has found expression.

All this said, many also reflect on the beauty of the Romanian liturgy and of the prayers and hymns they learnt in their childhood. The older generation, especially women,

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<sup>220</sup> When a colour photocopy of this icon, which was commissioned and painted by Russians in America, began 'streaming myrrh', it attracted the attention and devotion of believers in Russia and became the focus of pilgrimages. A documentary film was made and several books were written about the icon, which took on a symbolic significance for Russians around the world hoping for a return of 'Holy Russia'. See N. Schmitt, 'A Trans-national Religious Community Gathers around an Icon: The Return of the Tsar', in V. Roudometof, A. Agadjanian, J. Pankhurst (eds.), *Eastern Orthodoxy in a Global Age*, Altamira: Walnut Creek CA, 2005, pp. 210-223.

<sup>221</sup> Old man, *Kurçu* (Vinogradovka), 05.06. 2005.

that attended school between the wars still profess to know Romanian much better than Russian. However, the strength of anti-Romanian and anti-Moldovan feeling has been bolstered by more recent memories of the brief conflict with Moldovan nationalist militias in 1992 that attempted to extinguish the nascent Gagauz Autonomous Region.

In answer to my questions regarding the Gagauz language liturgy and use of Gagauz in the Church, elderly informants expressed their appreciation and explained that they could now understand the proceedings much better.

We couldn't understand before but *batuška* explains in our language too now what the Gospels say and he reads the Gospel too in Gagauz. He has been here seventeen years now. After the service he again explains things in Gagauz. Even if we don't go to Church so often, we remember what he says, he started to explain in a way we can understand.

(Varban Agrapina Konstantinovna, *Kazayak* and Radiş Vasilisa Vasilevna, *Kazayak*, 20.11.05).

Our *batuška* does a good job, he sings beautifully, and explains, he explains so well in Gagauz. We don't know Russian so well.

(Kalak Dona Dmitrievna, *Kazayak*, 17.11.05).

For even the most elderly informants their first experience of the Gagauz language being used in Church came only with the re-opening of the churches in the early 1990s. Only a tiny proportion of churchgoers had known any canonical prayers or hymns in Gagauz before this period.<sup>222</sup> Today, there is a strong cadre of Gagauz priests who, together with an unshakable devotion to the Russian Church, have a strong sense of belonging to the Gagauz nation. The nation, thanks to the work of Çakir and the new generation of priests that sponsors the use of his translations in church life, is legitimated through the Divine Liturgy and presents, at least for Gagauz believers, a strong affirmation of the Orthodoxy of 'Gagauzness'.

The process of encouraging and facilitating engagement in the liturgy was something that the Russian Church in general started to address only in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The introduction of church choirs was seen as a way not only of increasing lay

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<sup>222</sup> I reached this conclusion based on extensive questioning of lay church-goers regarding knowledge of canonical prayers; which language they had first learned to pray in, at home, school and church; and which language they prayed in at home. Only one of my informants could clearly remember having been taught the Lord's Prayer and the Symbol of the Faith in Gagauz as a child in the 1940s and she was the daughter of the *daskal* (choir master) of the village of *Tomay* (Garçu (Terzi)Varvara, born 1935, *Tomay* village).

participation but also as an educational tool through which parishioners would become familiar with the biblical tales recounted in the hymns. As well as the introduction of choirs, congregational singing also began to play a role in the service, although this did not meet with universal approval.<sup>223</sup> Amongst the Gagauz, despite Mihail Çakir's efforts in the early part of the century, this process reached fruition only in the early 1990s. Today, most Gagauz parishes have choirs, which are often led by the *matuşka*, the wife of the priest. The choirs sing the traditional Slavonic and Russian hymns during which the congregation is silent. However, in several villages Gagauz religious folksongs have been introduced into the service as well as additional hymns that have been translated into the Gagauz language locally, often by the *matuşka* themselves.<sup>224</sup> These are sung in the village of Kazayak, for example, during the communion of the laity. Participation by the congregation in this communal singing is always very enthusiastic.

In the 1990s the introduction of the Gagauz language into the Church service was led by members of the priesthood and was met with appreciation and enthusiasm on the part of lay believers. The older generation feel they now enjoy more than ever the chance to understand the teachings of the church and to participate in the services. Younger members of the church said that they too value it as an expression of their cultural identity.

Part of the motivation behind these moves by the Orthodox Church to incorporate the Gagauz language into church life derives from the success of Baptist and Adventist groups in their missionary activities in *Gagauziya*. As we discussed above, Çakir and the Orthodox Church in general perceived the threat from the *sectanţii* as early as the 1920s and since that time Baptist, Adventist and other Evangelical groups have grown exponentially, especially in the southern districts of Moldova.

Protestant groups have placed an emphasis on worship, prayer and congregational singing in the Gagauz language and also, most significantly, on Bible study. Catherine Wanner, in her study of evangelicalism in Ukraine, suggests that 'The strong emphasis on Scripture and its interpretation provides both an authentic, historical tradition and possibilities for local adaptation.'<sup>225</sup> This freedom to adapt quickly to local circumstances,

<sup>223</sup> V. Shezov, *Russian Orthodoxy on the Eve of Revolution*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2004, p. 77.

<sup>224</sup> I came across the use of these local translations in three villages of the eight villages I attended services at: *Beşalma*, *Kazayak* and *Tomay*.

<sup>225</sup> C. Wanner, 'Advocating New Moralities: Conversion to Evangelicalism in Ukraine,' in *Religion, State and Society*. 31:3 (2003), p. 276.



in this case the ethno-linguistic dimension in *Gagauziya*, has given evangelical groups an advantage over the centralised and somewhat authoritarian approach of the Orthodox Church. The Gagauz have attracted the interest of Baptist missionaries in particular because of their Turkic language. One Baptist website openly suggests that the Gagauz could play a 'strategic role in reaching the Muslim nation of Turkey for Christ'<sup>226</sup> and Southern Baptist groups have already encouraged ethnic Gagauz missionaries to go and work in Turkey. A 2006 report by the Georgia Baptists following an evangelistic 'crusade', to quote their own words, in the Gagauz town of Ceadır-Lunga remarked:

The people who had been given New Testaments were ecstatic. It was the first time they had ever had a Bible in their Turkish dialect.<sup>227</sup>

The Bible referred to above is the second of two recent translations of the New Testament<sup>228</sup> that are used by, and, in this case the translation itself was sponsored by, Protestant missionary groups. One young Baptist convert I spoke to emphasised the significance of Orthodox attitudes towards the Bible in her conversion to Baptism.

No one in the Orthodox Church had ever encouraged me to read the Bible; no one tried to explain to me what its message is. Now I read it for myself and I know the truth. Orthodoxy is just tradition, it is not Christianity.

(Young Baptist woman hitchhiking to Chişinău, 24.05.06).

The approach of the 'Bible' Christian missionaries presents a problem for the Orthodox Church, which traditionally does not place much importance on individual study

<sup>226</sup> 'Gagauz people: Key to Turkey', available at: <URL:

<http://archives.tonline.org/Archives/200006/Gagauz.htm>> [accessed 29 November 2006].

<sup>227</sup> J. Gerald Harris, 'Moldovan response to festivals inspires Georgia Baptists', June 22, 2006, available at: <URL:<http://www.christianindex.org/2332.article>> [accessed 29 November 2006].

<sup>228</sup> The first translation of the New Testament (excepting of course Mihail Çakır's translations: *Evangelie Gagauzça Türkçä*, 1909, the Gospel according to Matthew, *Ai (aiozlu) Evanghelieasâ, hani Apostol Matfeidean eazâea ghecilmiş*, Tipografia Eparhială – 'Cartea Românească', 1934, and Mark, *Ai (Aiozlu) Evangheliea Marcudan* – Gagauzcea (eschi Tiurccea), Chişinău: Tipografia 'Tiparul Moldovenesc', 1935) appeared in 2003 and was the work of Boris Tukan of the Ben Zvi Institute in Jerusalem – *Eni Testament* (trans. B. Tukan), Kishinev: Paragon, 2003. The second was published in 2006 and was translated by Gagauz Adventist Stefan Bayraktar for the Biblical Translation Institute in Moscow – *Eni Baalantı; İi Haber İi Hristos için*, (trans. S. Bayraktar), Moskva: Bibliyayı çeviren İstitut, 2006.

and knowledge of the Bible as the key to living a Christian life. Neither of the two translations of the New Testament now available in the Gagauz language is regarded by the Orthodox Church as correct or suitable for use by the Orthodox faithful and the Church actively discourages people from reading them. Orthodox believers therefore have none of the Holy Scriptures available to them in their own language. Bibles are of course available in the Russian and Romanian languages. However, this situation would seem to give the Protestant missionaries an advantage in appealing to the Gagauz on ethno-linguistic terms. Indeed, as one Soviet sociologist pointed out, despite the high level of linguistic competency in Russian of the Gagauz, many of whom master Russian far better than their mother tongue, the Gagauz have maintained a strong ethnic self-awareness,<sup>229</sup> which mother-tongue scripture and services appeal to.

In the doctrine of the Orthodox Church scripture is seen as only one part of twofold tradition. Bulgakov explains 'tradition' to be the 'living memory of the Church' and scripture is the 'perfectly recognised' aspect of that tradition.<sup>230</sup> However, scripture does not necessarily hold primacy over other aspects of tradition; legitimacy of Church doctrine in Orthodoxy does not rely on scripture. The two, tradition and scripture, are rather seen as a whole 'united, but not identical.'<sup>231</sup> As part of this duality of tradition the Church sees itself as the primary source for interpretation of scripture, which may in part explain why, in Russia particularly, the masses read other spiritual material such as the lives of saints and apocryphas rather than the Bible itself, which was largely the preserve of the educated priesthood. In 1824 the early attempts to make the Bible available in Russian were quashed by traditionalist clergy and Bibles approved by the Orthodox Church became widely available only from 1876.<sup>232</sup> This situation changed little in the 20<sup>th</sup> century especially

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<sup>229</sup> M. Guboglu, 'Ethnolinguistic Processes in Southern Moldavia', *Soviet Sociology*, 13: 3 (1974-75), p. 50. cited in I. Livezeanu, 'Urbanisation in a Low key and Linguistic Change in Soviet Moldavia Part 2', *Soviet Studies*, vol. 23, no. 4, p. 587.

<sup>230</sup> S. Bulgakov, *The Orthodox Church*, New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1988, p. 10.

<sup>231</sup> *Ibid.*, p.12.

<sup>232</sup> Russian language Bibles first began to appear in the 1820s under the supervision of the Imperial Russian Bible Society. However, there was much resistance to their introduction as many senior clergy felt that Church Slavonic was the only Slavonic language 'consecrated by ancient usage'. The Bible society, on the other hand, desired to give ordinary Russians the opportunity to read the Bible in a language more comprehensible to them than the archaic Church Slavonic. Rejection of the Russian language Bible by the clergy and monastics and accusations against the Bible Society of being in league with Freemasons and atheists in a conspiracy against Russia and her Holy Alliance with Austria resulted in it being abandoned and thousands of copies of the Pentateuch being burned. Significantly, the Church hierarchy did not object to the continued publication of sacred scriptures in other languages of the empire. Work on the Russian Bible was

during the periods of harsh state repression of religion when copies of the Bible was very hard to come by. The dissemination of scripture amongst the Gagauz may have the effect of seriously undermining the authority of the Orthodox Church amongst believers, a process that has also been recognised by linguists in the field of translations studies.

A new translation can be a serious means of challenging the Orthodox readings of a holy text or the means of creating a new cultural identity through separation from the established traditions.<sup>233</sup>

Initially, in the early 1990s, the Moscow Patriarchate supported the efforts of the Swedish Bible Society to translate the scriptures into the Gagauz idiom. However, disagreements soon arose between the various denominations involved and the Orthodox Church withdrew from the project. Some Orthodox Priests in *Gagauziya* are keen for translation work to be resumed locally in order to resolve this situation. However, due to the enormity of the task and financial constraints, it seems unlikely that this will be achieved in the near future.

Russian Orthodoxy can be termed a 'Church' Christianity; one centred on the Church as the locus of worship in which the sacraments and the celebration of the Divine Liturgy are at the heart of the Christian community. Over the past century the Church in *Gagauziya* and its community of believers have experienced dramatic political and ecclesiastical changes that have affected the pattern of religious life at its core. Shifts in the national orientation of the Church in Bessarabia have resulted in the emergence of a linguistically 'hybrid' liturgy in which the Gagauz language has an increasing presence. This incorporation of the Gagauz language into liturgical life was primarily inspired by the spiritual, and national, aspirations of the Gagauz priest Mihail Çakir. However, this did not reach fruition until the 1990s when a new generation of young Gagauz priests have enthusiastically worked to increase the role of the Gagauz language in Church life.

The Orthodox Church is also now being challenged by the advent of intensive missionary activity by foreign Protestant groups which offer a radically different kind of

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only resumed when a less conservative Tsar, Alexander II, ascended the throne in 1855. See G. Hosking, *Russia: People and Empire 1552-1917*, London: Harper Collins, 1997, pp. 138-142.

<sup>233</sup> L. Long, 'Introduction: Translating Holy Texts, in L. Long (ed.), *Translation and Religion*, Clevedon: Multilingual Matters Ltd., 2005, p. 6.

Christianity, one based, amongst other things, on the centrality of the Bible in spiritual life. The Orthodox Church in *Gagauziya* has recognised, if somewhat belatedly, the importance of scripture in the mother tongue if it is to compete with other Christian groups on a 'level playing field'.

Over the past 100 years, since Mihail Çakir's first attempts to introduce the Gagauz language into official Church practise, the Gagauz language has proved to be a significant factor in determining the development of Gagauz religious life. The historical record shows that the speech community, and their religious leaders, desired to increase the 'linguistic capital' of the Gagauz language in the religious sphere. This process is reflected today in the activities of both the Orthodox and the evangelical missionary churches that through the use of Gagauz language material and church services appeal to the ethnic self-awareness of the Gagauz. Initially, the Gagauz language became significant in the national awakening through the agency of the Church and in this sense the Gagauz model represents a 'religio-linguistic' form of nationalism. The primary function of the increased linguistic capital of the Gagauz language was to enhance the connection with the divine. The agency of language, as discussed in the introduction to this thesis, and, as I will argue in the chapters that follow, the emotive power of the mother-tongue, play a decisive role in the institutionalisation of religious practice.

However, the political changes that were brought about by Moldova's incorporation into the Soviet Union in 1944 caused far more radical changes in the structure of religious life and spiritual practice amongst the Gagauz than either the translation work of Çakir or the post-Soviet advent of Protestant missions. The almost total absence of 'church' in most Gagauz communities during the decades of Soviet power resulted in a period of perceived 'ignorance' amongst ordinary believers of their Orthodox faith and traditions. In the vacuum left by the retreating Orthodox Church lay believers drew on textual sources from outside the canon of the Church. A tradition of private translation and dissemination of a collection of what academics and clerics would term 'apocryphal apocalypses', known as *epistoliyas* to the Gagauz, which had started certainly by the 1930s, flourished in this period. With the use of this 'surrogate scripture', lay believers maintained in the private sphere of the home and in the community a spiritual life at the core of which, for the first time, were Gagauz language religious texts.

During this forty year period of repression of the Church, the normative model of Orthodox Church life was superseded by an emergent set of practices that seemed to 'enact' the socio-cultural and behavioural norms of Church life but within a linguistically Gagauz environment. These practices fell under the auspices of individuals, amongst them translators, healers and devout believers, who determined the shape of the lay institutions that emerged. One ethnographer refers to their Ukrainian equivalent as 'culture keepers' although in the case of the Gagauz, for reasons we shall explore in the following chapters, I would suggest the term 'culture makers' reflects their role more accurately.<sup>234</sup> In the chapters that follow in section two of this thesis we shall explore the texts, practices and individuals that constitute the lay institutions of Gagauz Orthodoxy, starting with the *epistoliyas* and their translators referred to above.

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<sup>234</sup> N. Kononenko, 'Folk Orthodoxy: Popular Religion in Contemporary Ukraine', in J. Himka, A. Zayarnyuk, (eds.), *Letters from Heaven: Popular Religion in Russia and Ukraine*, Toronto, Buffalo and London: University of Toronto Press, 2006.

### Chapter 3.

*Bu epistoliya yazdı kendi Allah – ‘This letter was written by God himself’<sup>235</sup>: Language, Lay Agency and the ‘Surrogate’ Text.*

My mother, she didn’t know Russian, she spoke only in Gagauz. There was no Church at the time, only the one in Tvardița was open, but we had no way of going there. [On Sundays] she wouldn’t give us anything to eat until it had passed twelve o’clock. We had an *epistoliya* in Gagauz, she had us read the Gagauz *epistoliya* whilst she listened, and later when it was twelve she would give us a little communion bread and a little holy water and after that we ate bread. I have an *epistoliya* here too. It tells how a big stone fell from heaven, and how when the stone opened they found a book inside that the Father had sent, and there [unintelligible word] inside. Gagauz, it was in Gagauz, it was read in Gagauz.

(Rusu Vasilisa Vasilievna, *Beşgöz*, 18.02.06).

In the extract above my informant explains how, in her childhood and in the absence of the Church and priests, her family used to observe Sundays and religious holidays. It is clear from her explanation that this would involve the ‘imitation’ of the ritual of communion and of the reading of the liturgy. Communion bread and holy water were taken, as one would expect in an Orthodox mass, but in place of the Russian liturgy we find a Gagauz language text, an *epistoliya*, being used. The term literally means ‘letter’, but is generally used to refer to legends and apocalypses that would be described by the clergy or scholars as apocryphal. The mother of the informant spoke no Russian and therefore naturally preferred to be read to by her children in her native tongue. The text in question, which the informant later showed me a copy of, was hand written in a school exercise book and had been translated from Romanian by another villager. Neither the text, entitled *Epistoliya İsusun* (The Epistle of Christ), nor the translation is officially sanctioned by the Church and in the absence of Church guidance or instruction this apocryphal text became invested with the symbolic status of ‘scripture’.

Gagauz believers themselves would not describe these texts as apocryphal and generally have little understanding of the reasons why they came to be so categorized. The

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<sup>235</sup> The opening line to an *epistoliya* from the notebook of Konstandoglo (Çoban) Maria, born 1932, village of *Tomay*.

Gagauz simply know of them as *epistoliyas* and as such they only carry negative connotations in so far as some believers are aware of the clerical injunctions against them. In this study I too shall refer to them using the local Gagauz term.

The use of *epistoliyas* in diverse situations as ‘surrogate’ scripture became widespread during the course of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. These independently translated Gagauz language texts had escaped the attention of linguists and ethnographers until very recently, when during the course of my fieldwork I was able to identify such texts in a notebook in the village of *Kazayak*. The failure of local researchers to spot the significance of this literature can perhaps be explained by the lack of knowledge of and also lack of interest in Christianity, and religion in general, amongst ethnographers and historians trained during Soviet times. It is only in very recent times that local historians, for example, have turned their attention to the history of the Orthodox Church in *Gagauziya*.<sup>236</sup>

In the course of my time in the field in *Gagauziya* it came to light that these ‘alternative’ scriptures are by no means just a curious anomaly but are in fact ubiquitous in the Gagauz religious landscape. In the early days in the field, in the course of conversations about religious practice and texts in the Gagauz language informants began to refer to and consult their notebooks. In this way I was able to collect or record over 20 examples of exercise books, or *tetradkas*<sup>237</sup> as they are commonly known, which contain these apocalypses and *epistoliyas* in six Gagauz villages. However, I was advised of countless other examples that could be found both in these villages and the neighbouring settlements.

The texts are most commonly found in school exercise books, alongside other religious material such as prayers, both canonical and non-canonical, psalms, and hymns. These religious notebooks contain predominantly Gagauz language material: over 90% of the material found in the *tetradkas* is in the Gagauz language. Indeed, this fact, supported by the testimony of informants and examples of how the texts were used such as the one cited above, gives the clear indication that one of the primary motivations for keeping such

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<sup>236</sup> The first overview of the history of the Orthodox Church in *Gagauziya* was published only in 2006. S. Bulgar, ‘Iz Istarii Pravoslaviya u Gagauzov’, in *Istoriya i Kultura Gagauzov*, Komrat-Kishinev: Pontus, 2006, pp. 464-476.

<sup>237</sup> *Tetradka* is the Russian word for exercise book and is commonly used in place of the Gagauz literary form *tefter*.

a notebook is to fulfil the need for religious material in the mother tongue that can be utilized in lay religious practice.

The texts themselves are remarkable for several reasons. Evidence suggests that some of the translations date back to the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and possibly earlier and may very well predate the earliest attempts by Çakir to translate religious texts into the Gagauz idiom. They therefore represent an 'autonomous' initiative to introduce the Gagauz language into religious life that was not inspired by the translation activity of the Church. This being so, they may also prove to be a valuable record of Gagauz popular religious terminology prior to any sustained influence of the new 'liturgical' Gagauz devised by Çakir. More generally, they also form some of the earliest texts of any genre in written Gagauz that have come to light and thus have wider significance for the study of the development of Gagauz literary culture. Given the potential importance of this literature from a philological and literary historical perspective, I have elected to include examples of some of the most commonly found texts in the appendices.<sup>238</sup>

These Gagauz language *epistoliyas* played a key role in village spiritual life in the form in which it emerged in the absence of the Church in the post-War Soviet period. However, the popularity of apocryphal and apocalyptic literature in the Orthodox lands, and especially Russia, goes back several hundred years; indeed some consider apocalypticism to be at the heart of the Russian religious psyche.<sup>239</sup> In the following pages we will first explore the origins of the rich strain of apocalypticism in Russian and Moldovan Orthodoxy, which are certainly at the root of the Gagauz tradition, before going on to look at the texts themselves, the translators and the Gagauz language translations, and how they are used amongst in Gagauz religious practice.

### 3.1 Russian, Moldovan and Gagauz Apocalypticism

The popularity of these apocalyptic apocryphal texts amongst the Gagauz can best be understood in the wider context of Russian, and more specifically Moldovan, Orthodoxy. Russian Orthodoxy is often ascribed with an inherent tendency towards the apocalyptic and

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<sup>238</sup> Extracts from *tetradka* texts appear in appendices 2-4. The name and biographical details of copyists and translators and some bibliographical details of *tetradkas* appear at the beginning of the bibliography.

<sup>239</sup> See Bulgakov on Russian Orthodox apocalypticism and eschatology. Bulgakhov, *The Orthodox Church*, pp. 176-186.



indeed a rich strain of popular eschatological prophecy and speculation has been well documented since the time of the Russian Revolution.<sup>240</sup> Going back earlier, Russia experienced a major apocalyptic crisis in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, triggered by the religious reforms of Patriarch Nikon (1652-1667) and broader changes in Russian society, which resulted in schism in the Orthodox Church and the foundation of the intensely apocalyptic 'Old Believer' movement, which regarded Tsar Peter the Great as the Antichrist himself.<sup>241</sup> In the 19<sup>th</sup> century the influential theologian Bukharev, under the influence of a 'holy-fool' called Father Petr, became convinced that with the Crimean War the world was witnessing God's judgement on the Whore of Babylon.<sup>242</sup>

Prominent thinkers and theologians of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century affected by Russia's rapid industrialisation, the famine of 1891, and the war and revolution of 1905 also revisited the theme of the apocalypse in their call for social justice and the spiritual rebirth of the nation. In 1899 in his final work 'The Anti-Christ', the prominent Russian theologian Soloviev voices his revulsion for secularised Christianity and pacifism, in a work that culminates in an eschatological tale that forecasts a cataclysmic war at the end of the world.<sup>243</sup> As one literary historian comments 'Russian literature and culture are suffused with an apocalyptic mentality that continually sees the present as end determined'.<sup>244</sup>

Although the eschatological and apocalyptic tendencies of the Russian Church have been linked to the particular ethnic psyche of the Russians and their Church, as in other parts of the world and in other spiritual traditions these tend to be triggered and find expression at times of social unrest, upheaval and transition. The social, economic and political climate of 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century Russia therefore would certainly fit this pattern. Lynne Viola makes the point that in the Soviet era the language of peasant protest and resistance during collectivization, which would certainly qualify as a time of social

<sup>240</sup> L. Viola, 'The Peasant Nightmare: Visions of Apocalypse in the Soviet Countryside', *The Journal of Modern History*, 62 (1990), p. 748.

<sup>241</sup> As a result of persecution at the hands of the Tsars many Old Believers fled to the border regions of the Russian Empire and beyond where they managed to preserve their beliefs and practices far from the prying eyes of the authorities. Old Believer communities can still be found throughout Moldova, which was on the western fringes of Russian influence. R. O. Crummey, 'Old Belief as Popular Religion: New Approaches', *Slavic Review*, 52: 4 (1993), p. 701.

<sup>242</sup> P. Valliere, *Modern Russian Theology*, Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2000, pp. 24-25.

<sup>243</sup> *Ibid.* p. 205-223.

<sup>244</sup> D. Bethea, 'Apocalypticism in Russian Literature', in C. Kleinhenz and F. Lemoine (eds.) *Fearful Hope: Approaching the New Millenium*, Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1999, p. 145.

upheaval, was in the form of apocalyptic rumour and prophecy which forecast the 'reign of the Antichrist, Armageddon and the second coming of Christ'.<sup>245</sup> To illustrate this point further using a non-Russian example, we might cite the case of post-revolution Romania. During the period of extreme poverty and hardship that followed the overthrow of Ceausescu, rumours of sightings of a devil, hoofed and tailed, disguised as an old woman abounded in the Romanian countryside amongst ethnic Hungarians uncertain of what the future might hold for them in those rapidly changing and trying times.<sup>246</sup>

Moldova too, in a similarly uncertain period of her history in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, gave birth to its own indigenous apocalyptic movement, which grew into a sizeable sect on the fringes of the Orthodox Church. 'Innochentism', as it came to be known, was inspired by the activities of an itinerant monk by the name of Ioan Levizor (1875-1917) from the region of Balta, located today in south-western Ukraine close to the present Moldovan border. As an ethnic Moldovan Inochentie, as he was called after taking his monastic vows, preached repentance and the imminent end of the world in the Romanian language to an audience that to a large extent had been starved of spiritual instruction in their mother tongue. The movement grew to such proportions that the Church authorities felt the need to close down his monastery and, at first imprison and later exile Inochentie to a monastery in Murmansk, in the far north of Russia. However, even these draconian measures were unable to suppress the growing movement and it was only after the monk's death in 1917 that it lost some of its momentum.<sup>247</sup> The main centre of the Innochentists, a community named 'Paradise' near Balta, was seized by the Soviet authorities and transformed into a collective farm. However, in Romanian Bessarabia the sect was able to continue unharassed. Despite Soviet attempts to eliminate the movement the sect persisted into the 1940s and was the cause of some irritation to the authorities because of their resistance to the collectivization of agriculture and their monarchist or pro-Romanov sympathies. In 1946-47, immediately after the catastrophic famine that hit Moldova in the winter of 1945-46, the Soviets arrested the 'Archangel Michael', as the leader of the sect was known, and a 'Mother of God', the honorific title given to female members of the group. The last

<sup>245</sup> Viola, 'The Peasant Nightmare', pp. 748-749.

<sup>246</sup> See V. Tanczos, *Keletnek Megnyílt Kapuja*, Kolozsvár: KOM-Press, 1996, p. 225.

<sup>247</sup> For a full account of Inochentie's career see: Clay, J., 'Apocalypticism in the Russian Borderlands: Inochentie Levizor and his Moldovan Followers', *Religion, State & Society*, 3-4 (1998), pp. 251-263.

recorded wave of Soviet persecution of the Innochentists took place in 1957 when a film was produced to support propaganda against the movement.<sup>248</sup>

In a recent article on Inochentie, Eugene Clay emphasised both his role as a focus of resistance to Russian ecclesial domination and the movement's distinct ethnic Moldovan character.<sup>249</sup> Certainly, during his lifetime this appears to be the way he was perceived, at least by the Russian Church hierarchy. However, there was nothing in his message that was unequivocally Moldovan in character: indeed, his call to repentance, abstention and penance has since bridged the acute ethnic divide between Moldovans and the Gagauz, amongst whom can be found adherents to the Inochentie's severe eschatological message. From the 1960s onwards, when the official Orthodox Church was at its weakest, Inochentist preachers began to find 'converts'<sup>250</sup> amongst the Gagauz. Today a small group of 40 or so Gagauz Inochentists can be found in the village of Tomay and the surrounding area. They form a loosely organised community with their own 'priesthood': elders known as Archangels, and a chief hierarch entitled the *Arhangel Mikhael*. Inochentists stress that their brand of Orthodoxy follows the monastic lineage, as Inochentie was a monk, and that they represent a legitimate branch of traditional Orthodox spirituality that has merely moved from the closed environment of the Monastery into the lay environment. As such, believers follow strict dietary regulations and cycles of fasting, abstain from all sexual relations and do not marry. Often Inochentists remain in the household of their non-Inochentist parents and relatives but otherwise lead a reclusive lifestyle on the fringes of the village community. The communities of 'young martyrs', the early Inochentist devotees who believed that the various afflictions they suffered were in penance for the sins of others and God's means of bringing redemption to the rest of the world, seem no longer to exist. The movement remains intensely eschatological in its teachings with adherents stressing that the coming of the end of the world can be measured in months not years. The influence of the Inochentist movement, which is constantly being denounced by the Moldovan Orthodox Church, is limited. However, there are popular apocalyptic

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<sup>248</sup> W. Kolarz, *Religion in the Soviet Union*, New York: Macmillan & Co Ltd, 1961, pp. 365-368.

<sup>249</sup> Ibid. p. 261.

<sup>250</sup> I hesitate to use this term in this context as Inochentists regard themselves as thoroughly Orthodox. However, the Church still considers them a heretical sect and denies Innochentists an Orthodox burial. Gagauz priests I spoke to do not allow followers of Innohentie into the local churches.

tendencies amongst the wider Orthodox community in contemporary Moldova, perhaps revived by the current catastrophic economic and political situation.

In a similar vein to the Greek Church's resistance to the Schengen scheme in the 1990s due to absence in the new identity cards of religious affiliation and the alleged presence in the barcodes of the cards of the serial number 666,<sup>251</sup> Moldovan Orthodox Christians have for the past few years been resisting the introduction of new bar-coded ID cards and passports that also supposedly include the number 666. Despite advice from Church leaders that there is nothing to fear from the passports many people refuse to renew their passports and identity cards and in such numbers that banks and official institutions have been forced to change their policies and regulations regarding proof of identity in order to take account of this issue of 'religious conscience'.

These ideas regarding the new Moldovan passports are widespread amongst the Gagauz too. The following is an extract from a conversation I had with a lorry driver that illustrates well the attitude held by many toward Moldovan state and Church authority and how this is linked to an eschatological interpretation of the current economic and political crisis that Moldova has been facing for the last two decades.

Lorry driver: 'So, you don't have a Moldovan passport then?'

'No, British.'

Lorry driver: 'Maybe you are safe then. You know our Moldovan passports have a number hidden in them, don't you?'

'I had heard, yes. So *you* don't have a passport then? You can't travel abroad?'

Lorry driver: 'No, we are trapped. Satan has us trapped here, he is clever, we will all die of hunger here...but the Patriarch, you notice he still comes and goes!'

(Diary extract, 29.04.06)

To hear this kind of view expressed by devout Orthodox believers in Moldova is not at all unusual and in some cases it is encouraged by village clergy and monastics. Added to this is the legacy of the use of apocalyptic *epistoliiyas* in lay religious practice, which can be traced especially in the Soviet period.

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<sup>251</sup> The following website shows a leaflet used in the campaign against the Schengen ID cards explaining the Church's opposition. <<http://anndann.musicker.net/rfidschengen.htm>> [accessed on 17 January 2007].

### 3.2 *Epistoliyas* and Apocalyptic Texts in the Gagauz Language

Given the recurrent theme of apocalypticism that is evident in Russian, and by extension, Moldovan popular Orthodoxy, and the fact that, as we noted earlier, canonical texts and scripture in the vernacular were extremely rare for the majority of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, it should not be surprising that the texts that we find most commonly in use amongst believers in *Gagauziya* are the *epistoliyas* and apocalypses. All of the *epistoliyas* and apocalypses I came across in circulation amongst the Gagauz, based on the linguistic evidence, were translated from Romanian or Russian.<sup>252</sup> In general the texts in question are what Mozes Gaster refers to as 'eschatological legends', which deal with the questions of death and the afterlife, the end of the world, and final judgement at the Parousia.<sup>253</sup> These texts were extremely popular amongst lay believers across the Orthodox world, and certain of them amongst Catholics also, in part because the Bible, in its archaic Church Slavonic form at least, remained primarily the preserve of the priesthood and the learned.

...the Bible was not everyday reading material for Russian people. They preferred the legends of saints, stories heard in the Church and apocryphal narratives, which were exceptionally popular.<sup>254</sup>

What follows is a brief description of the most common Gagauz language *epistoliyas* found in the *tetradkas* giving a brief account of the history, origin (where known), and content of each. As very many of the texts in the *tetradkas* appear without a title, or with the generic heading *epistoliya*, are handwritten, using varied orthographies, and in some cases are only approximate translations, it is often difficult to identify the source text. Therefore, in order to identify the Gagauz translations it was necessary to locate published variants in Romanian, Slavonic and English with which to compare them. Some shorter more obscure texts still elude precise identification.

Amongst the texts there are a number that can be termed apocalypses. A few of these are untitled and fragmentary and appear to be abridged and adapted versions of the

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<sup>252</sup> Often the translators retained the opening lines of the source texts in the original language (see appendix 1, text no.1) or retained key religious terminology in the language of the source text.

<sup>253</sup> Mozes Gaster, *Studii de Folclor Comparat*, Editura Saeculum I.O.: București, [undated], p.165.

<sup>254</sup> G. Orosz, 'A Mélységek könyve című orosz egzházi népénekekről', in V. Gyula (ed.) *A miskolci Herman Ottó Múzeum közleményei*, no. 28, 1993, p. 143.

two most commonly occurring 'titled' apocalypses. These two named apocalypses, the 'Apocalypse of the Mother of God' and the 'Apocalypse of John the Theologian', are categorised by Schneemelcher as 'later apocalypses', being a continuation of the Jewish and early Christian apocalyptic tradition but reflecting the canonical New Testament version of events regarding time and the end of days.<sup>255</sup>

The first of the two, 'the Apocalypse of the Mother of God', probably dates from the 9<sup>th</sup> century and has been preserved in Greek, Armenian, Ethiopic and Old Slavonic variants<sup>256</sup> with the earliest known Romanian manuscript, under the title *Călătoria Maicii Domnului la Iad*, 'The Journey of the Mother of God into Hell', dating from the 16<sup>th</sup> century. The Romanian variant was based on the Old Slavonic text, which in turn was a translation of the Greek.<sup>257</sup>

The *epistoliya* recounts how the Virgin Mary whilst praying, asks to be told of the sufferings of hell and of the afterlife. The Archangel Michael then appears to her and takes her to the four directions showing her the torments of all those who suffer in hell. Finally, she pleads for the intercession of all the saints on behalf of Christians everywhere, in answer to which her son, Jesus Christ, appears and grants the days of Pentecost as a period of respite for all those suffering the torments witnessed by his mother. This apocalypse is largely based on the Apocalypses of Paul and of Peter.<sup>258</sup>

I identified the Gagauz variants of this text by comparing them with M. R. James's English language translation entitled: 'The Apocalypse of the Holy Mother of God Concerning the Chastisements' and with the 16<sup>th</sup> century Romanian version referred to above.<sup>259</sup> In comparison the Gagauz examples are rather fragmentary and appear to have been abridged. They are entitled the *Epistoliya Panaiyanın*, 'The Epistle of the Mother of God', or simply *Epistoliya*. One example appears together with two other *epistoliiyas*, a version of *Epistoliya İsusun*, 'The Epistle of Jesus', and *Panaiyanın düşü*, 'The Dream of

<sup>255</sup> As classified in W. Schneemelcher (eds.), *New Testament Apocrypha, Revised Edition of the Collection initiated by Edgar Hennecke, Vol. 2.*, James Clark & Co: Cambridge, p. 691.

<sup>256</sup> Ibid. p. 694.

<sup>257</sup> This Romanian variant was published by B. Petriceicu Haşdeu in his two-volume collection of Romanian popular literature in 1878-81. See P. B. Haşdeu, *Cuvente den Bătrîni Vol II: Cărţile Poporane ale Românilor în Secolul XVI în Legătură cu Literatura Poporană Nescrisă*, Bucureşti: Editura Didactică şi Pedagogică, 1984, pp. 229-294.

<sup>258</sup> J. K. Elliott, *The Apocryphal New Testament*, Clarendon Press: Oxford, 1993, p. 686.

<sup>259</sup> A. Menzies (ed.), *Ante-Nicene Christian Library, Additional Volume Containing Early Christian Works discovered since the completion of the series, and Selections from the Commentaries of Origen*, T.&T. Clark: Edinburgh, 1897, pp.169-174.

the Mother of God' (for both see below), in what appears to be a single text under the title *Epistoliya Panaiyanın*.<sup>260</sup>

The second named Apocalypse is that of John; commonly known by the Greek title *Αποκάλυψις του Αγίου Ιωάννου του θεολόγου*, and probably dates from the 5<sup>th</sup> century. This apocalypse takes the form of a dialogue between John the Theologian and God in which John asks God to describe the Last Judgement and the end of the world. The result has been termed a 'consistent and conclusive' picture of the course of events at the end of the world.<sup>261</sup> The two examples of this apocalypse I have found in Gagauz are both connected with the title *Dünyanın Bitkisi*, the 'End of the World'. The first comes directly under this title and following some short introductory words begins with the standard opening lines of the apocalypse (see Appendix 2, text 2).

*Ayoz İvan dir ben pindim o büyük bayrla neredede İsus Hristos gösterdi kuvetini...*

Saint John said: 'I climbed the great mount where Jesus Christ showed his strength...'

The second example appears to have been contained in a volume under the title *Epistoliya, Misionarli yaprak dünnyanın bitkisi için hem İvan Tilogolun o lafetmesi Allahlan, her bir Hristiyan tanımın kıyadı* or 'Epistle, Missionary page about the end of the world and John the Theologian's conversation with God, a book that all Christians should know'. This version begins with a long preamble, which is partly un-translated and remains in the original Romanian, before the apocalypse proper opens, only this time without the opening lines referring to the location of Mount Tabor, which appear later in the text (see Appendix 2, text 3).

*İşit Sabi senin uslu çıranı hem yalvardı orda sveti İvan, yedi gün yedida gecä hem gördü birdän bir bulut aydınmk,...*

Hear Lord your worthy servant and Saint John prayed there, seven days and seven nights and suddenly he saw a cloud of light...

<sup>260</sup> Notebook of Maria Konstandoglo (Çoban), born 1932, village of *Tomay*.

<sup>261</sup> K. H. Schwarte, *Apokalyptik/Apokalypsen V. Alte Kirche*, TRE III, 1978, p. 262. quoted in Schneemelcher, *New Testament Apocrypha*, p. 693.

These two versions of this apocalypse clearly demonstrate that multiple versions of the same text were in circulation and that they originate from different originals. Beside the fact that the two texts open differently, they also vary in regard to the terminology used. Whereas the first variant consistently uses the Gagauz term *Ayoz*, from the Greek *ἅγιος*, for Saint, the second uses the Bulgaro-Slavonic term *Sveti*. This kind of philological evidence is significant because in the absence of firm data regarding the time, location and circumstances of translation, a problem we shall discuss in the pages that follow, it gives us some indication of the number of village translators operating and the extent of their work.

Apart from the two apocalypses outlined above there are a number of other texts that may be based on other well known apocalyptic texts. Due to their abridged formats, rather formulaic contents and sometimes very vague language it is difficult to identify exactly the parent text but they may possibly have their origins in the 'Apocalypse of Paul'. This Apocalypse, more than any other, was responsible for the spread of many of the popular ideas of Heaven and Hell throughout Christian world and especially in the Western Church of the Middle Ages. The earliest version was most likely Greek, dating from the mid 3<sup>rd</sup> century. Due to what Schneemelcher describes as its 'rambling and repetitive' nature, shorter recensions of this apocalypse were produced.<sup>262</sup> The Slavonic tradition of this apocalypse remains largely unstudied.<sup>263</sup> I was able to identify this apocrypha by comparing the Gagauz texts with the earliest extant Romanian manuscript dating from 1550, which was published by Moses Gaster under the title *Apocalipsul apostolui Paul*.<sup>264</sup>

Another *epistoliya* recounts how the fourth century saint Macarius the Hermit is visited by an angel of God in the form of a beautiful child. St. Macarius asks the angel about the fate of man in the afterlife and the angel then reveals to him what happens when the soul leaves the body. This *epistoliya* is briefly mentioned in Gaster's study of Romanian apocryphas, 'Apocrifele în Limbă Română', under the title *Întrebarea sfântului Macarie cu îngerul lui Dumnezeu*. However, he gives no more details regarding its origin

<sup>262</sup> Elliott, J., *The Apocryphal New Testament*, Clarendon Press: Oxford, 1993, p. 465.

<sup>263</sup> H. Duensing, A. de Santos Otero, 'Apocalypse of Paul', in Schneemelcher, 'New Testament Apocrypha', p. 716.

<sup>264</sup> M. Gaster, *Chrestomatie Română, Texte tipărite și manuscrise (sec. XVI-XIX), dialectale și populare*, vol. I, Leipzig-Bucarest: F. A. Brockhaus, Socecu & co, pp. 1-3.



and content, simply stating that multiple manuscripts exist.<sup>265</sup> The single example I found in the Gagauz *tetradkas* was translated from Russian.<sup>266</sup>

In addition to the apocalypses listed above there are several other texts that can be found in the Gagauz *tetradkas* that also go under the name of *epistoliya*. These, on the whole, appear to be later apocryphas and are scantily (or not at all) treated in the academic literature. By far the most common of these is the text entitled *Epistoliya İsusun* in Gagauz, referred to by Moses Gaster in Romanian by its first line: *Epistolia Dommului nostru Isus Hristos pe care a trimis-o Dumnezeu din cer într-o piatră*, 'The Epistle of our Lord Jesus Christ which was sent by God from heaven inside a stone', also commonly referred to as *Legenda Duminicii*, 'Legend of the Sundays'.<sup>267</sup> The legend tells how a stone falls from heaven, very small in size but extremely heavy. The Patriarch of Jerusalem, uncertain what to do with the stone, calls a meeting of the Church hierarchs who then pray for guidance. A voice from heaven instructs them to break open the stone, inside which they find a letter from Christ, which vilifies those men and women that do not respect Sundays according to Christian teachings. Those that follow Christ's instructions will be rewarded; those that do not heed his words shall be punished. This text, which spread throughout Western Europe, is unusual in that its origins can be traced with reasonable confidence to the medieval sect of the Flagellants who preached exceptionally strict observance of the Sabbath.<sup>268</sup> Characteristic of these texts is their claim to be the direct words of God or of Jesus Christ, as the opening lines of this Gagauz text demonstrates.

*Allahın lafları bizim Allahımız İsus Hristozumuz ne yoladı yukardan  
gök üzünden dedi sesleyin Hristiyanlar...*

The words of God, of Our Lord Jesus Christ, that he sent from on high, from heaven. He said 'listen Christians...'<sup>269</sup>

<sup>265</sup> Gaster, *Studii de Folclor*, p. 174.

<sup>266</sup> From the notebook of Konstandoglo (Çoban) Maria, born 1932, village of *Tomay*.

<sup>267</sup> Gaster, *Studii de Folclor*, p. 172.

<sup>268</sup> *ibid.* p. 173.

<sup>269</sup> Notebook of Hacıoglu Zina Georgievna, village of *Kurçu*. Appendix 2, text 1 presents the opening page of another variant of this *epistoliya* from the *tetradka* of Rusu Vasilisa Vasilienva, village of *Beşgöz*.

The Gagauz language versions of the text, of which there are very many, were compared with the version of *Legenda Duminicii* published by Moses Gaster.<sup>270</sup> This text together with the 'Epistle of the Mother of God' and *Panaiyanın düşü*, 'The Dream of the Mother of God' (introduced below), are the three most popular *epistoliya* texts found in the Gagauz language.

In addition to these longer *epistoliiyas* there are a number of other shorter apocryphal texts that commonly appear in the Gagauz *tetradkas*. Of particular interest are the texts that are related to the 'Heavenly Letter' or the 'Letters from Heaven'. These texts, which once again are simply referred to as *epistoliya* in Gagauz, belong to a tradition that dates back perhaps as far as the 6<sup>th</sup> century. Similarly to the 'Epistle of Christ', the original versions of this text are concerned with the observance of Sundays and they resurfaced in Europe in various forms throughout the medieval period. They seem to have reached the Eastern Slav lands via Poland in the 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> centuries and became very popular across Eastern Europe. The letters commonly reference Pope Leo and state that he sent the letter to his brother the King, or Karl, to order to request aid against his enemies.<sup>271</sup>

The Gagauz texts that fall into this category all begin with characteristic account of the letter falling down to earth and being found in some location in or near Jerusalem.

*Bu epistoliya yazdı kendi Allah hem yolladı erin üzünä 1508 yilda hem yazılıyda altın bukvalarlan, bulundu büük Salamonun klisesindä neredä duudu Allahın anası 12 yıl hem yaşardı...*

This letter was written by God himself and he sent it to earth in 1508 and wrote it with golden letters. It was found in the church of Solomon the Great where the Mother of God was born and lived for 12 years...<sup>272</sup>

They then continue with injunctions against working on Sundays and list the consequences of each infringement of heavenly law.

<sup>270</sup> Gaster, *Chrestomtie Română*, p. 8-9. Appendix 2, text 1 presents the opening page of a Gagauz translation.

<sup>271</sup> A. Zayarnyuk, 'Letters from Heaven: An Encounter between the 'National Movement' and 'Popular Culture', in J. Himka, A. Zayarnyuk (eds.), *Letters from Heaven: Popular Religion in Russia and Ukraine*, Toronto, Buffalo and London: University of Toronto Press, 2006, pp. 168-169.

<sup>272</sup> Notebook of Konstandoglo (Çoban) Maria, born 1932, village of *Tomay* (Tomai)

*Hem onda vardı yazılı bölä....*

And it was written there thus: Whoever works on a Sunday will be cursed all their life. Before everything go to church, old people and young people, women and children, and pray with faith and tears and I will forgive your sins. Whoever harnesses his ox on Sunday and goes to the market to sell or to buy will have famine and profitless labour and grief and illness and many troubles will fall on his house because he didn't keep Holy Sundays,...<sup>273</sup>

Other Gagauz texts connected to the 'Heavenly Letters' appears in the form of a closing formulas attached to the end *epistoliyas*. These closing formulas express the benefits, both this-worldly and other-worldly, of reading, copying, reciting or carrying about ones person the *epistoliya* in question.<sup>274</sup> We shall discuss this kind of closing formula in more detail in chapter seven in relation to 'archaic' prayer traditions (see pages 241-245). These closing texts also often have the classic references to Pope Leo and his brother Karl that are characteristic of the 'Heavenly Letters'.<sup>275</sup>

Finally, one more text closely related to the 'Heavenly Letters' deserves mention. Known in Romanian as *Talismanul*, or the 'Talisman', it is popular throughout the Romanian speaking territories. Despite its popularity, I did not come across any translations of the text in the Gagauz *tetradkas*. However, printed editions of *Talismanul* are sold at markets on stalls selling religious books and paraphernalia. It opens in much the same way as the 'Heavenly Letter' by stating the date of discovery of the text and locating it to the Holy Land. The text is defensive in character and enumerates the various benefits and immunities that the prayer grants to those that follow its instructions, which includes the ubiquitous call to observe the Sabbath. As the title suggests, the text also states that it should be worn as an amulet or talisman.

The most commonly occurring and popular text is the 'Dream of the Mother of God', or *Panaiyanın düşü*, which together with 'The Twelve Fridays' or *Oniki Cuma* and *Talismanul*, are in circulation in both printed form, in Romanian, and in *tetradka*

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<sup>273</sup> Ibid.

<sup>274</sup> See Appendix 2, text 4.

<sup>275</sup> A very similar Hungarian example has been collected by Zsuzsanna Erdélyi. See Zs. Erdélyi, Aki *ezt az imádságot...*, Pozsony: Kalligram, 2001, pp. 70-73. A reproduction of a Gagauz variant appears in Appendix 4, text 5.

translations in Gagauz.<sup>276</sup> These texts, especially the 'Dream of the Mother of God', according to one Hungarian ethnographer, 'undoubtedly show how, following the conversion of the Slavs to Christianity, the *magical consciousness* rooted in the archaic mythological worldview survived, or rather, was reproduced in the new Christian environment.'<sup>277</sup> The persistence of texts such as 'Dream of the Mother of God' amongst Russians is one of the factors that have encouraged the academic speculation about the nature of Russian spirituality being a 'dual faith' or 'double belief', or *dvoeverie* in Russian, a syncretic mixture of Christianity and pagan survivals. The attitude of scholars towards such texts, and the terminology employed to describe them, have deeply affected notions of what constitutes Orthodox Christianity in its Russian context. Terms such as *dvoeverie* that seek to express a duality that exists within popular or folk religion, which may or may not exist in the mind, practice and self-perception of believers, serve to legitimate the authority of the clerical order, which accepts or rejects aspects of the lived religion based on Church doctrine. 'The Dream of the Mother of God' is a prime example of where popular practice, clerical injunction and academic mythmaking meet. As we shall see shortly, the use of this text, and others like it amongst the Gagauz, links Gagauz religious practice with the wider discourse on the culture of Russian Orthodoxy. However, the specific context of 20<sup>th</sup> century *Gagauziya* presents additional linguistic and cultural dimensions to debates on the nature of 'lived' Orthodoxy.

'The Dream of the Mother of God' has been the subject of a number of studies by Central and East European historians and ethnographers beginning in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>278</sup> The legend tells how the Virgin Mary falls asleep and in her dream sees Jesus' arrest, suffering and crucifixion. She then asks her son if these things will come to pass. Jesus replies that, indeed, everything his mother witnessed will happen just as in the dream and that it must be so in order to save mankind. The legend goes on to promise, in the kind

<sup>276</sup> A fourth text, simple known as *Brîul* in Romanian or 'The Belt' is also extremely popular in Romania. However, I did not find examples of this text in the Gagauz *tetradkas*.

<sup>277</sup> Gy. Orosz, '„Csódálatos álmat láttam...“, A „Legszentebb Istenszülő álma“ című nagyorosz egzházi népénekekről', in E. Pócs (ed.), *Extázis, Álom, Látomás*, Budapest, 1998, pp. 422-453.

<sup>278</sup> The Russian Veselovskii deals in detail with the origins of this legend in the fourth article in his series 'Essay on the History of the Development of Christian Legends' (A. N. Veselovskii, 'Opyty po istorii razvitiya khristianskoi legendy', *Zhurnal Ministerstva narodnogo prosveshcheniya*, No. 3 (1876), pp. 326-367). Other studies include: E. Kałużniacki, 'Zur Geschichte der Wanderungen des "Traumes der Mutter Gottes"', *Archiv für slavische Philologie*, 11, pp. 37-57, M. Hain, "Der Traum Mariens": Ein Beitrag zu einem europäischen Thema', *Dona Ethnologica, Beiträge zur vergleichenden Volkskunde*, 71 (1973), pp. 218-232.

of closing formula that is common in many folk prayers and incantations, relief from worldly suffering as well as eternal salvation for whoever learns, recites or carries the text upon their person.<sup>279</sup>

This apocrypha is known in many variants in the Russian-speaking world and several different versions exist amongst the Gagauz, although with only minor differences. The origins of the legend have been linked to both the Christian and pagan worlds. The Hungarian ethnographer Zsuzsanna Erdélyi believes that the dream sequence originates from the prophecy of Simeon in the New Testament (Luke 2:25-35), whereas others have linked it to ancient Persian legends. However, most commentators agree that the legend made its way from Western Europe via Catholic Poland to Orthodox Russia where it gained its extraordinary popularity.<sup>280</sup> Due to the widespread use of this text in healing rituals for the sick and dying we shall revisit the traditions surrounding *Panaiyanın düşü* in chapter four. *Panaiyanın düşü*, taking as it does the form of a prayer, will also be discussed in chapter seven alongside other examples of 'archaic' or folk prayer.

'The Twelve Fridays', another text closely associated with notions of Russian 'dual belief', is linked to the Russian cult of Saint Paraskeva, who is also seen as a personification of the day of the week 'Friday'. The cult of 'St. Friday', the Gagauz *Ayoz Cumaa*,<sup>281</sup> demanded the veneration of 12 Fridays throughout the year. On these dates women in particular were expected to fast and eschew certain household tasks; in return they would secure, amongst other things, protection from misfortune and violent death.<sup>282</sup> The text relating to this tradition, which is in the form of an instruction, is said to have been issued by Pope Clement. Ivanits, relying on Maksimov, states that 'like the 'Dream of the Mother of God', it was copied and recopied by the segment of the population that was marginally literate and kept in great secrecy from the clergy and curious ethnographers alike'.<sup>283</sup>

Each of the categories of *epistolıyas* outlined above share some dominant central themes. The Final Judgement, the afterlife, descriptions of the torments of hell, strict

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<sup>279</sup> The closing formulas of archaic forms of prayer are discussed in chapter seven, pages 241-245.

<sup>280</sup> For a summary of the origins debate, see Orosz, "Csódálatos álmat láttam...", pp. 436-438.

<sup>281</sup> This personification of Friday also appears in Gagauz folk prayer as Sevgili Cumaa. See chapter three for details.

<sup>282</sup> The rewards and protections that are listed in the 'The Twelve Fridays', similar to those in the 'Dream of the Mother of God', are also common to other forms of apocryphal text. They are dealt with in more detail in chapter 7, which explores folk and 'archaic' prayer amongst the Gagauz.

<sup>283</sup> L. Ivanits, *Russian Folk Belief*, Armonk, New York, and London: M. E. Sharpe, Inc., 1989, p. 33.

behavioural instructions and moral advice for this life are a feature of most of the texts. These messages are accompanied, in many instances, by promises of eternal salvation and protection from bodily harm for those that learn, recite or carry the said texts. The message of this literature in many ways expands on, clarifies and elucidates many aspects of Christian life that are only partly or vaguely outlined in canonical scripture. In this sense this literature, on a textual level, can be said to offer believers added certainty and security in their conceptions of their religious lives. However, as will become clear from discussions below, these collections of texts, which in scholarly discourse belong to the category of apocrypha, are rejected and suppressed by the Orthodox Church.

### 3.3 Translations, Translators and *Tetradkas*

Whereas most of the apocryphal texts listed above were in the past available in Romanian and Russian, mainly in the form of cheaply produced pamphlets, and could be purchased on market stalls, especially on religious holidays and at Church festivals, the texts found amongst the Gagauz are the work of individual translators, ordinary village people that worked to bring the texts into the Gagauz linguistic community.<sup>284</sup> A subtle distinction can be drawn here between the nature of the texts in these differing linguistic environments. For the Russian or Romanian literate villager this literature was part of the popular religious cultural landscape and was accessible to the community as a whole. In the case of the Gagauz it had to undergo a process of translation by a limited number of literate Gagauz, speakers of Romanian or Russian, who made available what can be considered a rather more precious resource: Gagauz language religious material intelligible to the monoglot Gagauz speaker.

The works of these largely anonymous 'peasant' translators were copied and handed down by the grandparents and parents of my informants. Some examples are the work of people still living and in these few cases the translators were able to give valuable information regarding their motivation for completing the translations and the uses they put the texts to; information which is wanting in the majority of cases where the material was handed down through families and copied multiple times by neighbours and villagers.

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<sup>284</sup> This kind of popular religious literature appeared in cheaply produced editions known as 'chap-books' in English or *volksbücher* in German. In Romania they known as *cărți poporane* or 'books of the people'.

The material found in the *tetradkas*, which is described above, is found alongside a whole range of other religious texts: prayers, hymns, Psalms, lives of Saints that have likewise been translated into the Gagauz language or on rare occasion copied from material originally published in Gagauzian. However, the *epistoliyas*, apocalypses and other apocryphal legends form the overwhelming majority of the material. Generally my informants had no knowledge of who originally translated the texts or where they had been copied. The most common response to my enquiries regarding the provenance of the material was ‘..from an old man who died’ or ‘from a neighbour who borrowed it from somebody else’. Likewise, when probing into the source of the original text, whether it was printed material, handwritten, in the form of a book or loose sheet, often met with blank expressions of non-comprehension. This could be partly due to the linguistic problems of expressing in the Gagauz language these various forms of literary material. In the Gagauz language, *kiyat* can mean both ‘book’ and ‘paper’ and also ‘letter’. The relevance to my informants of such questions, which were top of my research agenda, seemed secondary at best. However, what became clear was that the material had come to them in the Gagauz language and that it was not considered to be a ‘translation’ as such but rather a wholly ‘Gagauzian’ text. In this sense the process of ‘forgetting’, rather than memory, played a formative role in the institutionalization of Gagauz language texts in lay religious practice.

The translation of religious material, and especially scripture, under ‘usual’ conditions, takes place under the auspices of a religious body, whether that be a Church or Bible society and so on. This inevitably has an enormous impact on the way in which a translation is approached. The concerns of translators engaged in official translation works, such as doctrinal consistency and faithfulness to the original text, as well as those of publishers such as the potential market and readership, determine to a large extent the nature of the final product.<sup>285</sup> In the case of the translations in question these issues were peripheral or even irrelevant. The works, by their very nature, are not fully consistent with the doctrine of the Church and were influenced by the official liturgical forms only to very limited degree, due to the scarcity of canonical texts in translation. Regarding faithfulness to the text, it is evident from the many fragmentary versions of *epistoliyas* amalgamated from different sources that this was also not of prime concern.

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<sup>285</sup> For a discussion of these issues see L. Long, ‘Introduction’, in *Translation and Religion, Holy Untranslatable?*, Clevedon: Multilingual Matters Ltd, 2005, pp. 1-15.

The village translators of *Gagauziya*, by their own testimony, were concerned with producing texts for their own personal use and for that of the immediate sacred community. Intelligibility to the user, often the translator himself, was of primary concern. Texts are thus littered with words and phrases in the language of the original source text (Russian, Church Slavonic and Romanian).<sup>286</sup> Often, when no suitable Gagauz equivalent to a word could be found, explanatory words are embedded in the text as well as religious signs and symbols. Sometimes whole sections of text have been omitted.<sup>287</sup> In this sense they are an example of a pure 'target-orientated' approach to translation and reflect the reality of linguistic competency in the various languages of the community itself; they pay no attention to the sensibilities of the Church and her representatives. Ideas of 'faithfulness' and 'accuracy' are completely given over to 'effectiveness' in an entirely unselfconscious and un-reflexive manner.

It is very difficult to make any estimate on the numbers of people translating texts and copying religious *tetradkas*. The material I collected from the villages of *Kazayak*, *Tomay*, *Beşalma*, *Kurçu*, *Beşgöz*, and *Avdarma* would seem to indicate that most villages produced at least a couple of people that translated material and several more that would copy and use this material. From the accounts of translators and their descendents and from the few dated *tetradkas* I came across, translations were in circulation by the first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and new translations and copies were still being made well into the 1990s.<sup>288</sup> When seeking to determine the age of material I would ask my informants how old their *tetradka* was but the response was often: 'Very old, at least 50 years!' At which point a neighbour or friend would interject with 'Oh, no, much older, 100 years perhaps!' The notebooks also disintegrate with age and are re-copied, with the originals then being discarded by their owners. My reconstruction of this aspect of the *tetradka* culture therefore must remain tentative.

Members of the local clergy in *Gagauziya* have an awareness of the translation activity of some of their parishioners. Whilst recognising that any manifestation of faith during the communist period was a positive thing, which helped 'prove' the truth of the

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<sup>286</sup> An example of this can be seen in both text 1 and 3 of Appendix 2.

<sup>287</sup> As the actual Romanian and Russian source texts, which themselves may have been heavily edited, were not available to the author it was impossible to determine just how many alterations, omissions or additions have been made to the texts by the *tetradka* translators.

<sup>288</sup> The earliest *tetradka* I was shown was dated 1911. Others were dated 1948, 1973 and 1997.



Christian message, they also condemn the resultant works on grounds that they were not commissioned by or carried out under the authority of the Church.

Christianity finds a way, it stays alive no matter what...but these people make many mistakes [translators of religious texts]. They are not priests like Çakir. They shouldn't translate because they miss the real meaning of the words. They just use the words that come to mind. These things should not even be in the same notebooks as Church prayers. This is very wrong.

(From conversation with Father Dimitrie, Tomay, 01.04.06).

The work of the 'peasant' translators is here compared to that of their contemporary, the pioneer of Gagauz scriptural translation, Mihail Çakir. We know that Çakir, despite his earnest attempts to introduce the Gagauz language into the liturgy, failed ultimately, for mainly political reasons, to shift the primary language of Church services and scripture away from the largely unintelligible Church Slavonic and Romanian. Where Çakir failed in regards to official Church practice, the village *tetradka* translators, some of whom we shall meet later in this chapter, largely succeeded in creating a Gagauz language religious 'institution', albeit outside the sphere of official religion. However, the Church did play a role in another way in the creation and spread of this tradition.

As stated above, *tetradkas* were generally kept for personal use and circulated in the local community amongst neighbours and family members, but they also on occasion found their way beyond the immediate village or parish community. During the decades of Soviet suppression of the Church the ecclesial centres that remained open and active drew believers from the surrounding areas, especially on festivals and holy days. *Tetradkas* were borrowed and copied on these occasions from local *klisecilär*. The Cathedral in the town of Bolgrad, just over the border in Ukraine, served as such a centre for the faithful from the villages of *Kazayak*, *Tomay*, *Beşalma*, *Kurçu* and many other villages, while their own parish churches were being employed as grain stores and agricultural museums. Easily reachable by train from these villages, Bolgrad was still far enough away to afford a degree of anonymity for those travelling there. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union the town of *Çadır-Lunga*'s nascent church and convent also acted as such a centre.

Another local centre that remained in operation was the convent of *Svyato-Rozhdestvo-Bogorodichniy*, the Convent of the Holy Nativity of the Mother of God

between the Gagauz villages of Alexandrovka and Dmitrovka, just over the border in Ukraine. In the 1940s there were more active monastic institutions in Moldova than in the whole of the rest of the USSR, but following scores of closures in the 1950s and 1960s only one, the convent at Japca, remained open into the 1980s and the era of Glasnost. However, like the Cathedral Church in Bolgrad, the Convent of the Holy Nativity of the Mother of God played an important role as a centre of religious activity for the mainly Gagauz and Bulgarian population of southern Moldova and Ukraine.

Historically the monastic tradition has played a defining role in the Orthodox Church, and monastic clergy and monks have, in the past, exercised considerable power in both Church and state. Byzantine emperors frequently had to deal with unruly hordes of angry monks intent on overturning their decrees. Like their predecessors in Constantinople, Russian Tsars too resorted on many occasions to laying siege to troublesome monasteries in order to silence their critics. However, it was not just in their relations with the secular powers that they came into conflict with central authority; within the Church also the monasteries frequently resisted the modernising moves of the Russian Holy Synod and successive Patriarchs. Orthodox monks are generally far more conservative than their married counterparts in the parishes. This in part explains why in the Orthodox tradition lay believers reserve the deepest reverence and respect for monastics, often considering their local clergy to be too materialistic and motivated by worldly concerns to be worthy of the highest veneration. The almost unreserved respect and devotion shown to the simple and uneducated monks and nuns by believers may partly explain how the monastic centres also acted as the means for the dissemination of the apocryphal literature amongst the Gagauz. The freer, less theologically precise or hidebound spirituality of some monastics, who share the same cultural roots and traditions as lay believers, allowed more openness to the texts that hovered on the edge of acceptability. Historically, monks were also often at the forefront of the apocalyptic movements that stressed the imminence of the end of days, strict moral codes and an austere lifestyle, all things that are central to the message of the *epistolias*. Several of my informants recounted how the apocryphal texts in their possession had been copied or learnt directly from monks and nuns. The *klisecilâr* who frequented the monasteries at festival times would use this as an opportunity to exchange and copy each other's *tetradkas*. *Sonyi babu*, the old woman referred to in the extract below from a conversation with a villager from *Beşalma*, was considered to be particularly

holy and was believed to have the gift of prophecy. Many of the apocryphal prayers and legends in circulation in the village are said to have been brought back by her on her frequent trips to monasteries.

The old woman I was telling you about went to the monasteries and brought back the songs, many songs and stories about *Allah*, lots of them! She had a grandchild our age and they liked us, so we would spend a lot of time together; we listened to her read the *epistoliyas*, she would burn some incense and direct us on the right path, teach us how to be good [...] she had many *tetradkas* with prayers and *epistoliyas* and her prophecies about the future.

(Çakir Elena, village of Beşalma, 29.04.06)

Another noteworthy example comes from the village of *Avdarma*, where Evdokiya Feoderovna Kristova, an elderly informant, told how the apocryphal legend of the Virgin Mary that she and her granddaughter recited for me had been learnt directly from a Moldovan nun in the monastery of Chiţcani.<sup>289</sup>

### 3.4 *Epistoliyas* and Lay Religious Practice

In the example shown at the opening of this chapter we saw how the *epistoliyas* were used in place of scripture when, due to the political circumstances, Church attendance was impossible. Today the *epistoliyas* are still used in this way by the elderly when they are unable to attend church due to immobility and illness. Older informants often admitted that they were '*diil pek gramatny*' - not so good with letters – and so would not read often and when they did, as I witnessed on several occasions, it would be a rather ritualised form of recitation of the text, the importance being placed on the 'act of reading' and of 'hearing' the sacred text, rather than on study or comprehension. However, there were also occasions when it appears that the texts were used in an instructional manner as implied by the extract from the village of *Beşalma* above. Most of the *epistoliyas* and apocalypses, through their legendary tales of journeys into hell, and accompanying explanations of the causes of man's eternal sufferings, offer behaviour models and instruction on issues of

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<sup>289</sup> She cited the monastery as Chiţcani. However, there is no monastery under this name in Moldova and I suspect she was referring to Japca, the only monastic institution that remained open throughout the Soviet period. For the English text of this legend see page 240 and for the Gagauz original see Appendix 4, text 4.

conduct that are not necessarily explicitly stated in the gospels, which in any case were not widely available to Gagauz villagers until very recently.

However, these same texts were also used to perform rituals that under 'normal' circumstances would be performed by the local priest using canonical material. The following ritual described to me by Zina Hacıoglu, who was a young girl at the time of the events, was performed in the spring of 1948, a couple of years after the *büyük açlık* (great famine) of 1946, and seems to mimic the yearly spring procession of crop blessing and also the 'blessing of waters' at the feast of Theophany.<sup>290</sup>

When there was no rain, the women, the old women, would gather together and go to the fields; there was no priest then. I had the little book with me [a collection of *epistoliyas* in Gagauz] so they took me along. I was the youngest, I was a pupil still, I read the book so that rain should fall. The women gathered together, they took food, a little water.... eh! to the fields and many places, to the hills and meadows and next to the wells, it was read like a prayer. Oh, I read that little book and everybody listened, everybody prayed. Later from the heavens our Father gave us rain.' [When questioned about the origin of the translation my informant replied] 'I translated it myself, I was young, I was afraid there would be another famine.

(Diary entry of conversation with Hacıoglu Zina Geogievna, Kurçu, 05.06.06).

Here my informant states that the texts, copies of *Epistoliya İsusun* (The Epistle of Jesus), *Dünyanın Bitkisi* (The Apocalypse of John the Theologian)<sup>291</sup> together with *Panaiyan düşü*, are used *dua gibi*, like prayers, to ward off misfortune. This rare example of a testimony from a living translator gives an insight into both the motivation for the translation of *epistoliyas* and into the way they were employed in ritual practice during the Soviet period.

In addition to the *epistoliyas* and apocalypses themselves, defensive or supplicatory endings were also added to the texts with the aim directing the divine power of their words in order to avert various dangers. These closing formulas were mentioned earlier in connection with the 'Heavenly Letters' (see page 116). Such texts, most commonly found as the closing formulas of the talismans and folk prayers, which will be looked at in more detail in chapter seven (pages 141-145), enumerate the specific protective qualities of the

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<sup>290</sup> Shevzov, *Russian Orthodoxy*, p. 105.

<sup>291</sup> See Appendix 2, Text 4.

*epistoliyas* and apocalypses.<sup>292</sup> The following example was tagged onto the end of an *epistoliya* from the village of *Tomay*:

These letters show how much good and enmity this Epistoliya has Amen. Whoever carries this *epistoliya* will not die from persecution, whatever kind of obstacle there be glorious God protects. The one who does not believe may tie someone to a tree who carries at his bosom this Epistoliya, shoot him with a rifle, and even then will not hit him. Just as Christ remained protected in the grave, God will protect him from any enemy, both visible and invisible, and from those who would have evil intentions over his home. As they could not oppose Christ so they, in the same way, will not be able to oppose whoever has on him and whoever carries at his side this *Epistoliya*.<sup>293</sup>

(*Tetradka* of Stoykov Feodor Feodorovich, village of Tomai)

Such closing formulas are also often found at the end of texts that fulfil the specific role of protective 'talisman'. Most common amongst these texts is the *Talismanul* described above (see page 116). The following justification for the use of apocryphal texts in this way, entitled *Luare Aminte* or 'Bear in Mind', is from a printed booklet containing the *Talismanul* and *Brîul*, another similar talismanic text, published in Romania. It contains no bibliographical data whatsoever but is printed in the same format and style as official religious booklets printed by the various ecclesial and monastic presses in Romania and Moldova. This seems to have been done in order to disguise its origin and give it an air of authority. The continued publication and circulation of such texts demonstrates the ambiguity and contested nature of the popular practices related to the whole range of apocryphal texts of the kind we have been discussing.

The Church approves of the carrying of certain holy objects such as: the cross, icons, the image of the Lamb, wood from the Cross of Christ, holy writings, in the belief that these objects are blessed by the Church. The first Christians carried medallions with the Cross

<sup>292</sup> According to the Hungarian ethnographer Vilmos Tánzos, and based on his collection of Hungarian religious folklore on Moldavia, such defensive closing formulas 'believably document the everyday concerns and spiritual world of man in the Middle Ages'. His categorisation of such formulas largely corresponds with the examples the author collected amongst the Gagauz. However, there are a few notable exceptions; amongst the Catholic Hungarians the defensive formulas sometimes include passages to protect against the 'anger of God' and also 'spiritual problems' such as melancholy or shame. See. V. Tánzos, *Eleven osztja szép virág: A moldvai csángó népi imák képei*, Csíkszereda: Krónika, 2000, pp. 342-343.

<sup>293</sup> See Appendix 2, text

and with the monograph of Christ symbolising their salvation shielded by the Cross. They also carry the Gospels as confessed by all the Holy Fathers. And in this way Christians today carry at their breast or place on the head of the sick such religious books as follows: 'The Dream of the Mother of God', 'The Belt of the Mother of God', 'The Epistle of the Mother of God', 'The Talisman', 'The Cross of Crosses', 'The 12 Great Fridays Through the Year', 'The undoing of the Curse', etc.<sup>294</sup>

In addition to their use as protective amulets the *epistoliyas* and apocalypses are also used at times of illness when they are read as a form of incantation. *Panaiyanın düşü* (The Dream of the Holy Virgin), which amongst the Gagauz commonly takes the form of a prayer,<sup>295</sup> in particular is reserved for very specific situations:

*Panaiyanın düşü* is sung when a person is very ill, when they are barely breathing, this is when it is sung, chanted, read ....that they may recover. If this does not save them they will die.

(Kalak Dona Dmitrievna, *Kazayak*, 17.11.05).

This old lady [the woman about whom she was speaking was sitting before us, but had suffered from a stroke and lost the power of speech] came to my father when he was dying. He was suffering terribly, his soul just wouldn't leave his body, he couldn't die. After she read *Panaiyanın düşü* he just quietly slipped away.

(Valentina Bujilova Mihalovna, *Kurçu*, 05.06.06).

In his article on the 'Dream of the Mother of God', György Orosz attempts to illuminate the reason for the specific use of the text at the time of death by understanding the dream motif as a symbol of death. In the dream state, that is following death, the dreamer has access to the 'truth', which in this case is the truth of the crucifixion and salvation in Christ.<sup>296</sup> In chapter three we will revisit this text when looking at spiritual healing practices and techniques amongst the Gagauz. For the moment we should note the great popularity of this text, which became particularly apparent during my conversation with informants. On several occasions, when people I spoke to became aware that I was familiar

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<sup>294</sup> *Talismanul*, publisher unknown, p. 14 (purchased in December 2005 from a seller of religious books and gifts, *Komrat*).

<sup>295</sup> See Appendix 3, Text 3.

<sup>296</sup> Orosz, "Csódálatos álmot láttam...", p. 440.

with the text and its content, they would request a copy from me if they themselves didn't possess one.

The use of *epistolias* is opposed by the Orthodox Church. Not only does the Church object to the non-official nature of the translations but also the material itself is non-canonical and judged to be against the teachings of Orthodoxy. The various contexts in which they are used are also considered suspect. The Clergy in Gagauziya express their disapproval of these texts and often informants in Gagauz villages told me that their local priest had forbidden them to use such texts, especially *Panaiyanın düşü*. However, the attitude of the village priest to the texts seems to have had little influence on their continued use by villagers, who in many cases are the *klisecilər* most closely involved in the running of the local church.

I have heard the *matuşka* [the wife of the priest] say we shouldn't use this prayer [*Panaiyanın düşü*] but I have no idea why. She didn't explain why. It is about Jesus and The Mother of God, what can there be wrong with that? People use it anyway regardless.

(Trandafilova (Kirma) Darya, village of *Avdarma*, 29.10.05)

It is not only on a local level that opposition to the apocryphas is voiced. The Romanian Church has published several booklets in recent years warning of the dangers of the use of *epistolias*, *Talismanul*, and *Panaiyanın düşü*. The following extract comes from one such booklet simply entitled *The Dream and the Belt of the Mother of God*.

In our times, many Christian men and women look for salvation from the cares of the soul, through the purchase of one of the Epistolias or 'The Dream of the Mother of God' that are bought from markets and towns. Observing this, the enemies of the faith and of our nation (the Bogomils and others), started to become preoccupied with our Christians who are ignorant of the Orthodox faith, printing from one or other of these heretical things harmful to souls.<sup>297</sup>

Another such booklet states, 'In reality, the apocryphas lure the weaker souls towards a mistaken faith, towards superstition.'<sup>298</sup> We can judge from this the seriousness with which

<sup>297</sup> *Visul şi Brâul Maicii Domnului*, Bacău: Editura Bunavestire, 2001, p.11.

<sup>298</sup> *Efecte înşelătoare, Talismanul, visul, Epistolia şi Brâul*, Constanta: Mănăstirea Dervent, 2000, p. 4-5.

the organised Church opposes these texts. Yet despite the official Church's attempts to stamp out their use these texts can still be found for sale on bookstalls and markets, often directly outside churches and on the occasion of church festivals. I was able to purchase a copy of *Talismanul* and *Brâul* on a Church-sponsored market stall on sale next to another booklet warning of the spiritual danger of using precisely these texts!<sup>299</sup> The fact that the texts are in Romanian and seem to have found their way into *Gagauziya* from Romania gives some weight to the assertion of Gagauz priests that such bad practices can be blamed on the influence of the Romanian Orthodox, whose Church, in the eyes of the Russian Church at least, is seen as inferior and somewhat 'sacreligious'. If anything, the dissemination and use of apocryphal texts amongst Orthodox believers appears to be increasing despite Church efforts.

The varied apocryphal texts found in the *tetradkas* fulfilled a number of functions in Gagauz spiritual life. Most commonly the texts were used as 'surrogate' scripture on Sundays and to mark other days in the religious calendar when the churches were closed. They are still used today when church attendance is impossible due to illness or immobility. Certain texts are used in healing rituals with the pragmatic goal of aiding bodily recovery. The texts were also used in other rituals to defend the community or individuals from a whole range of worldly dangers, which are often enumerated in special closing formulas aimed at directing the spiritual power of the words towards specific defensive aims. They might also be carried as protective talismans, particularly the text that is commonly referred to as *Talismanul*. Finally, the 'Dream of the Mother of God' fulfilled a specific function as succour for the soul at the time of death.

In the light of this strong legacy of apocalyptic movements and eschatological thought in Russia, and more specifically in 20<sup>th</sup> century Moldova, which were inspired by extended periods of upheaval, social tension and uncertainty, it is perhaps no wonder that Gagauz Orthodoxy became heavily steeped in this apocalyptic culture. In the absence of Church guidance in the mother tongue in the 1920-40s and due to the weakness of the Church from the 1940s to the 1990s, the 'sects' both Protestant such as the Baptists and Adventists, and those on the edges of Orthodoxy, like the apocalyptic 'Innochentist' movement, began to find converts in the Gagauz region. For those that stayed loyal to

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<sup>299</sup> The booklets on sale, which contain the apocryphal texts themselves, typically contain no bibliographical details regarding where and when they were printed.



Orthodoxy the *epistoliyas* fulfilled a valuable role as 'surrogate' scripture to an isolated linguistic community which was without the Church as a locus of worship and without canonical scripture in the mother tongue, something which the Church had failed to provide effectively despite the earnest intentions of Çakir at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The Gagauz adopted these eschatological legends, which had always been some of the most popular texts of Russian and Romanian popular Orthodoxy, as their main source of religious material; moreover, without the guidance of the priesthood and regular church services some believers replaced them with their own improvised forms of worship and ritual employing these *epistoliyas*.

Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Gagauz region has experienced unprecedented social upheaval, near total economic collapse and an ethnic conflict that brought the Gagauz to the brink of all-out war with the central Moldovan authorities. These circumstances have fed a sense of isolation and desperation in a society that now lacks confidence in structures of authority, both temporal and spiritual. All this has again revitalised the apocalyptic tendencies that were generated by earlier crises. As discussed earlier, this renewed recourse to the eschatological message of the *epistoliyas* may very well be due to the deep sense of hopelessness and desperation that many Moldovans feel in the current economic and political climate.

The popularity of apocalyptic texts and their diverse use as defensive talismans and incantations is especially significant in the case of the Gagauz due to their unique status as a linguistic minority. The *epistoliyas*, because of their assimilation into an indigenous 'Gagauz' form, have become imbued with an enhanced 'spiritual power' and status. Although apocryphal legends enjoy similar popularity amongst Russians and Romanians, in recent history this has been balanced by greater access to the teachings of the Church in the mother tongue. In the case of the Gagauz the apocryphas formed their prime source of religious literature in their own language up until at least the mid-1990s.

Also, the emotive power of the texts, with their direct and often harsh moral message warning of the sufferings in the afterlife for transgressions committed in this life, may have helped to re-impose a sense of social order where none was perceived. The texts speak to believers, not through the Church, which over the past 100 years has proved to be both weak in the face of political pressure and unable to satisfy the growing expectation of a religious message communicated in the language of the people, but in words that profess

to come directly from *Allah*, or one his emissaries, and are delivered in the simple language of the people. In this sense they come closer to an unmediated address from the divine. The immediacy of an address in the mother tongue, in the Gagauz language, and the one which purports to come direct from the source, rather than via a human intermediary, seems to establish an enduring authority in the speech community. The 'fact' of translation, and its subsequent 'forgetting', does not seem to diminish this authority. However, the changing context of Gagauz religious practice, which allowed, and even encouraged, the translation of the *epistoliyas* has changed the way that authority is 'balanced, perceived, [and] experienced'.<sup>300</sup> The *epistoliyas* represent a written record, or testimony, to the textual dimension of Gagauz lay orthodoxy and its institutional role in the 'production' of religious authority. This authority is therefore not one based in historical authenticity but in the changing context of political and social life.

The activities of the state in suppressing the organised Church had an inevitable effect on the way that Christianity was practised during the Soviet period. How believers bridged this period has necessarily altered the relationship between Church and the faithful. The Orthodox Church in many respects considers and presents itself as a symbol of certainty and continuity in changing times. However, most believers grew up without the Church as an active local institution and, as we have seen, even when the Church was present, the effectiveness of its message was very much hindered by language. Many older Gagauz have a strong feeling of cultural discontinuity, a feeling that they are 'ignorant' in religious matters and that vital knowledge has been lost. On the other hand the spiritual traditions that were generated and moulded in the family and the community, the translation culture of the *tetradkas* and the use of *epistoliyas*, gave lay religious practice an authoritative 'institutional' base.

In the earlier chapters we examined how the agency of political and academic elites and the clergy were instrumental in constructing notions of Gagauz identity from the top-down. The *tetradka* translations and the role of *klisecilär*, on the other hand, give us an insight into the way that agency is employed in local religious practice, from the bottom up. Both of these discourses, the macro-discourse of ethnic nationalism and Church politics, and the micro-discourse between lay agents and official religious actors, operate

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<sup>300</sup> See P. Gifford, 'Religious Authority: Scripture, tradition, charisma', in J. Hinnels (ed.), *Routledge Companion to Religion*, London and New York: Routledge, 2005, p. 380.

on the 'object' of study, that is the believer and his or her religious identity. We have already seen how Çakir constructed an image of the 'pious', 'faithful' and 'Orthodox' Gagauz, who are nonetheless of Turkic origin and have Islamic cultural traits. This image is in contradistinction to the wholly unorthodox, Baptists, Adventists and Communists, who he presented as the threat to the ethnic and religious nation. In contemporary discourse the 'other' has become the Romanian or Moldovan, who is perceived once again as the main threat to both true Orthodoxy and to the Gagauz nation. The Gagauz priesthood identifies the pernicious influence of the *epistoliyas* and all manner of other forms of religious impropriety with this figure of the ethnic 'other' (see page 186-188). In the field of lay practice, the use of both canonical and apocryphal texts by the Gagauz relied on translation to make them accessible to the language community. The primary distinction drawn between texts by Gagauz practitioners, which determines for many, especially the elderly, their use and function, is whether a text is in Gagauz or not.

In the chapters that follow on healing, other dichotomies and bi-polar categorisations that have been instrumental in defining the contours of the discourse on 'folk' religion will be examined in the context of Gagauz lay practice. Again, these will be examined in the context of the 'encounter' between lay agents and representatives of Church Orthodoxy. In addition to the role of 'text' and context in healing ritual, the role of performance in the institutionalisation of lay practice will also be explored.

#### Chapter 4.

*Düstän Allahın lafını sana geldi!*– ‘The words of God have come to you in dream’:

Healing, Divine Authority and the Church.

Healing is one of the fundamental elements of the meta-narrative of Christianity and amongst the rural populations of Central and Eastern Europe it is also one of the principal spheres in which traditional ‘folk magic’ is employed. In the context of their Christian faith Gagauz believers associate the practice of healing with the mission of Christ and of his apostles, whilst at the same time, in the local arena, it is the legitimate practice of the village ‘folk’ healer. The relationship between the Church, the accepted inheritors of Christ’s mission on earth, and the traditional healer is characterised, as Frazer puts it, by the ‘relentless hostility with which in history the priest has often pursued the magician’.<sup>301</sup> However, the simple equation of ‘church versus magic’ does not do justice to the complexity of the relationship between these two fields of practice and their respective sets of actors, nor does our inherited cultural understanding of the category of ‘magic’ necessarily fit the ritual healing practices that have traditionally had this label applied to them.

In *Gagauziya*, despite the vocal hostility of the Church towards folk healers, they continue to practise, and what is more, they do so as active members of the Church. Healers also exercise a degree of religious authority, which has its source outside the institution of the church. It is the aim of this chapter to explore, primarily through the practices and testimonies of Gagauz village healers, how these two contiguous traditions coexist as bases of authority and agency in the religious sphere today. Like the translators and copyists we have already discussed, the *ilaççi* healers are to be found amongst the *kliseci*, those active within the orbit of the newly revived Orthodox Church.

As with the previous chapter I hope to explore the context within which lay practice evolves and its situatedness within the linguistic and cultural environment of contemporary *Gagauziya*. Many of the historical factors explored in the previous chapters are also key determinants in the development of Gagauz healing practice. However, unlike previous

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<sup>301</sup> J. Frazer, *The Golden Bough*, London: Wordsworth Editions, 1993, p. 52.

chapters the following two chapters place emphasis on contemporary practice. This chapter also introduces the 'performative' aspect of healing and how performance theory can help explain the generation of authority in the context of lay practice. This will be done through examples of episodes of actual discourse in and about healing practice.

Although the healing practices, which we shall refer to provisionally by their commonly ascribed label of 'magico-religious', are often explicitly 'religious' in their register, in Central and East European literature they are most often approached under the rubric of the study of magic and not of religion. Healing practices are frequently discussed alongside other forms of what is described as 'folk magic', such as love spells and fertility rites. The case is made at the outset for at least a partial re-evaluation with regards to the healing tradition of the Gagauz, which in many ways is comparable with that of the neighbouring peoples. Firstly, this is done on the simple basis that healing 'has been a driving force in the construction of Christianity'<sup>302</sup> and that it is an omnipresent aspect of Christianity as experienced by believers all over the world. That is to say, wherever healing rituals are practised in a Christian context, however 'magical' in character they may appear to be, due to the abundance of scriptural references to healing and the historical inheritance of the healing 'paradigm' in Church doctrine, they also require examination on the level of Christian practice and belief. Secondly, the Gagauz clearly distinguish, both conceptually and lexically, between the practice of healing and the practice of *büüü*, meaning sorcery or magic. The former is the preserve of men and women of virtue who appeal to and draw power from the celestial realm; the latter is practised by those of suspect character, the feared and the despised. Finally, David Gay makes the point that despite the fact that charms or incantations are 'one of the most obvious expressions of European Christian healing', Church censure and injunctions have ensured that they are classified as 'other than Christian'. Often, having been designated as 'folk' practices, healing rituals have been associated with survivals from earlier spiritual traditions, such as paganism or shamanism, with the result that they are seen to indicate the presence of a duality in the minds of believers where none may exist.<sup>303</sup> The point here is that the Christianity of healing practices, and their accompanying incantations or charms, deserve to be considered in

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<sup>302</sup> A. Porterfield, *Healing in the History of Christianity*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2005, p. 4.

<sup>303</sup> Gay, 'On the Christianity of Incantations', p. 32.

other than church-centric terms if we are to appreciate Christian culture, and in our specific case Gagauz Orthodox Christian culture, in a broad and inclusive manner.

Some quite unplanned and unanticipated events in the early months of my fieldwork brought me into contact with the traditional healing practices of the Gagauz. Instances of personal illness and the resulting offers of local remedies and cures, some of which are recounted in the following pages, initiated me into the world of the Gagauz healers, the *ilaççı*, literally the 'healer', and the *okuyucu*, or the 'reader'. Through these encounters and experiences it became clear that traditional forms of medicine and healing, and the people practising them, are intimately connected with both the transcendent beings of Christianity and with the Orthodox Church and its practices. An understanding of the sphere of healing is therefore critical when approaching the complexities of the relationship between lay religious practice and authority and Church authority.

Healing rituals are grounded in the immediate and compelling needs of the individual and his or her community. The practice of healing is one aspect of religion where 'belief' touches our existence as corporeal beings most directly. The pragmatic worldly necessity for the restitution of bodily health or mental well-being places healing at the very centre of a popular belief system, which, it can be argued, values the urgency of 'order' in the 'here and now' above the less tangible concerns of the next world. However, depending on the cultural context, the understanding of the relationship between healing in a physical sense and healing on a social or spiritual level may vary considerably. This is termed by Littlewood the 'tightness' of the double register, how closely the physical illness is associated with the spiritual and/or social realms.<sup>304</sup> The legacy of Pauline Christianity has been to bring the relationship between transcendent and physical realities into close parallel with the duality of good and evil, in such a way that bodily health becomes tightly associated with spiritual wellbeing.<sup>305</sup> Orthodox Church doctrine affirms the view that restitution of bodily (and mental) equilibrium can be achieved, if not solely then at least partially, by the cleansing of the soul.

Amongst the Gagauz, as in all societies, there are socio-culturally shared explanatory theories on the origins of illness. In common with many Christian societies, physical illness is often understood as being the result of antagonistic or evil forces, which

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<sup>304</sup> R. Littlewood, *Religion, Agency, Restitution*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001, p. 73.

<sup>305</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 75.

are thought to harm both the physical and spiritual wellbeing of the individual. Some of these take the form of personified 'sickness' spirits that have power and agency of their own, seeking out vulnerable victims. Another is the belief in evil eye, common throughout Europe and Middle East and known as *nazar* amongst the Gagauz, which is human in origin, and that often inadvertently or unintentionally causes harm to people. Sachs classifies these causes together as 'mediated' forces as they result from the action of forces or entities outside the self.<sup>306</sup> From my conversations with a wide cross section of Gagauz society, belief in the agency of such powers appears to be ubiquitous.

The role of spiritual powers and transcendent beings in the pathology of various illnesses also suggests, and in some cases requires, that the healing processes too have recourse to them. This may take many forms, involving prayer, blessings or ritual intervention, which employ techniques of remittance, and supplication or coercion of spiritual powers. It is this recourse to the divine or spiritual realm and the reliance on intervention or co-operation with these powers in the healing practices, much more so than is perhaps the case with other forms of ritual intervention such as 'love' magic, which invests the activities of the healer with a specifically 'religious' character and places him or her in the role of intermediary or mediator between these two registers.

How the healer takes on this role within the community and is invested with the authority to practise is determined by all those factors that impact on his or her scope for agency. In our case the Orthodox Church is the primary body that claims authority in the religious sphere and can exercise its power of agency in order to regulate the activities of healers. The narratives of scripture and liturgy also inform and curtail the activities of healers. The community too, as the holder of socially constructed and inherited norms, symbols and patterns of behaviour, plays a 'constraining and enabling' role on the practice of healing. It is the main aim of this chapter to describe how this scope for agency is constituted and how the various factors, the 'texts', the 'context' and the 'performance' of healing, come together to establish a institutional framework that is invested with the authority of tradition.

In this chapter, following a brief outline of the culturally inherited healing system and its pathology of disease, we shall go on to examine three aspects of the healing system.

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<sup>306</sup> L. Sachs, *Evil Eye or Bacteria: Turkish Migrant Women and Swedish Health Care*, Stockholm Studies in Social Anthropology 12, Stockholm: Stockholm University, 1983, p. 75.

The first, explored primarily through the biographies of healers, relates to claims of a divine calling and the origins of 'spiritual' authority in healing practice. The second investigates the *modus operandi* of the traditional healing system, focusing especially on the role and agency of spiritual beings, both divine and demonic, in the actual performance of healing. Finally, the connections with and the role of Church are discussed, addressing the issue of how individual actors relate to the Church as an institution and authority base and in turn how the clergy exercises influence and control over healing practices in the contemporary post-Soviet context.

The functional links between these three factors will assist in better understanding the triangular relationship between first, the Orthodox Church and its clergy and doctrines, second, the village healer, and third, the spiritual and divine powers: relationships which bridge the 'double cosmological register'<sup>307</sup> of the higher reality, the ultimate source of salvation and alleviation of suffering, and the human world of mental and bodily affliction. This multi-dimensional relationship, which is shown through the dialogue between healer, patient, divine agent and researcher, informs our understanding also of how the scope for agency is determined not only in regard to healing practices but in the wider religious sphere.

#### 4.1 The Traditional Healing System

I attended a wedding in the village of *Avdarma* after which I suffered from a severe headache and vomiting, something I put down to over indulgence in the local wine, throughout the night. However, the following day it was interpreted quite differently by the grandmother of my host family. I was advised that as a stranger to the village I should not have drawn attention to myself as I had the night before, when according to her I had danced the local *fırlıkundak* at the wedding 'rather too well'. 'So many eyes were on you; you have surely been given the evil eye. Painkillers won't help you!'

(Edited diary extract, 29.10.05, *Avdarma* village)

My return to the Trandafilov family four months later was fortuitous for both my research and my health. The grandmother of the household was the mother of twins and this gave her the specific gift

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<sup>307</sup> This is term used by Littlewood in his discussion of the healing role of prophets and founders of new religions who mediate between the realities. Littlewood, *Religion, Agency*, p. 72.



of being able to cure ailments of the foot or ankles by *basmaa*; pressing or stepping on the effected limb. As I had been immobilised for the past few days with a swollen right foot [that turned out later to have been an attack of arthritis] it was jointly decided, by the family and myself, that I should be treated the next day. Early in the morning, before breakfast, I was seated on a chair on the threshold of the door between two rooms with my foot placed tentatively on the base of the doorframe while the grandmother passed back and forth from room to room, stepping on my foot each time, as I repeated the prescribed words *Hiç bişey istemem* – ‘I don’t want anything’ three times over.

Later the same day we visited an *okuyucu*, a woman who uses charms to heal. She was the neighbour of the grandmother and had agreed to try to heal my foot as well as explain how she performs her healing practices. After first repeating the charm that she would use for me she crossed herself three times, took a little baby lotion and began to massage my foot while reciting the charm again.

*Çekettim bir uzak yola,  
Karşı geldim büyük samkeylan, ...*  
(I set out on a long road,  
I came across a big Samka [evil illness spirit])

After a few short minutes she seemed to become quite drowsy and began to yawn repeatedly. My friend that had accompanied me enquired if she was ok. ‘Oh, this is a sign that the illness spirit is leaving, when I yawn it is leaving’. The closing words of her charm were:

*Bändän okuması,  
Allahtan da ilacı!*  
(The charm comes from me,  
The cure comes from *Allah*!)

When my treatment was over, the grandmother who had given me the first treatment jokingly exclaimed to her neighbour. ‘Oh, well, if he gets better we won’t know who it was that cured him, me or you.’

(Edited diary extract, 11.02.06, *Avdarma* village)

The passages cited from my diary and field-notes illustrate a couple of occasions when, through personal illness, I gained some insight into the Gagauz cultural understanding of illness and its treatment. In the two cases cited above my personal ailments were associated respectively with *nazar*, or evil eye, and a *samka* illness spirit. Amongst the varied

methods and approaches to healing are what appear to be simple 'magical' acts, like the grandmother's practice of *basmaa*, but also more complex techniques involving charms, massage and invocation of *Allah, İsus or Panaiya*, in order to extract an illness spirit. The healing system of the Gagauz includes these as well as modern biomedicine, and healing rituals mediated by the Church. In the following pages we will examine what I term the 'traditional' healing system that encompasses the world of the village healer. Later in this chapter these practices will be contrasted with local understandings of the practices and teachings of the Orthodox Church on healing and illness.

The experiences and accounts collected together in this chapter are the result of a number visits to healers from various Gagauz villages whom I sought out in the course of my time in the field. However, my first contacts with healers in the village of *Avdarma* (recounted above) and in *Kazayak* came about by chance and at least partly due to personal illness. On these occasions I was at once both patient and participant observer. The trust I placed in the local healers, and that they placed in me, resulted in access to people and data, which under more fortuitous medical circumstances might never have arisen. However, as I was situationally involved in the immediate concern of gaining some relief from my, at times not insignificant pain, I found myself in a 'liminal' space, both observing and participating in the object of study. The most obvious result of this was to make me the object of some pity and increased curiosity on the part of the local healers.

I later, with somewhat less urgency, sought out *ilaççilär* and *okuyucular* healers in other villages with the aim of broadening my experience of healing ritual, eventually being able to witness nine healing rituals. I also interviewed 15 *ilaççilär* and *okuyucular* and recorded *okumak* healing charms from 10 practitioners. Of these healers three in particular gave accounts and performed healing practices that illustrate well the scope and complexity of the relationship between the traditional healer and divine and spiritual beings. Their accounts, given later in this chapter, also give us some insights into the connection between the *ilaççi* healers and the local Church and Clergy.

Healing ritual practices are employed in relation to a wide range of disorders and conditions, both physical and psychological, and are one of its most common manifestations in everyday life of popular beliefs. In Gagauz communities, the various forms of healing are a common and routine activity. These practices are neither 'peripheral' nor 'sub-cultural', nor indeed 'exotic', in the way that many have come to

consider witchcraft or magic in a western European context. Although some of the practices and incantations may be 'secret', the phenomena of healing and the healing system itself are the common 'property' of the community and the 'rules' and 'boundaries' within which they operate are understood by all. For example, the particular conditions which each healer can treat, on which days it is appropriate to seek a consultation or cure from a healer, and the formalities of how to 'pay' the healer, are widely known, especially amongst older women.

Healing always takes place in the home of the healer, unless the person seeking a cure is immobile or too ill to be moved. It is a private rather than public practice at which usually only the healer and the patient are present. My presence during healings, when it was someone other than myself being treated, was always negotiated in advance. On a couple of occasions I was told that someone should never use a charm in the presence of someone older than himself or herself. However, it was unclear whether this also meant that the healer should always be older than his or her patient.

The healing system of the Gagauz displays a degree of professional specialisation on the part of the healers, and there are a range of terms that are employed to refer to the different types of healing practitioner that are found in *Gagauz* towns and villages. However, the use of this terminology is not always transparent and there is ambiguity and overlap in terms of meaning. The descriptions given below are intended as a brief introduction to the most common terms; the professions and practices to which they refer will be elaborated throughout this chapter.

The most common term used to refer to the healers themselves is *ilaççi*; 'one who cures', derived from the word *ilaç* meaning 'cure' or 'medicine'. The most authoritative Gagauz dictionary gives the term *ilaççi* as an archaism equivalent to the Romanian *descîntător*: someone who uses incantations or charms, a witch.<sup>308</sup> The term in practice is most often used to refer to healers of some standing or renown, who may or may not employ charms or spells. The *ilaççilär* (pl.) I met were far from what would commonly be understood as a classic witch in the western European or Anglo-Saxon sense of the word. Each of the three healers presented in the biographies later in this chapter, despite many dissimilarities in terms of the techniques, verbal utterances, ritual actions and the

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<sup>308</sup> *Gagauzça-Rusça-Romınca Sözlük*, Chişinău: Pontus, 2002.

implements they employ, are referred to locally as *ilaççi* on the basis of their ability to actually effect cures. An *ilaççi* is a healer only: he or she *ilaçlêêr* (heals).

There is another term that is often employed to refer specifically to those that use charms or incantations, whether in the context of healing (which is most often the case) or for other types of ritual intervention, which originates from the verb to read: *okumaa*. Although the verb *okumaa* is used to refer to the act of reciting an incantation or charm, the corresponding noun derivative *okuyucu*, which exists in literary Gagauz with the meaning: 'one that reads', 'reader', and in standard Turkish meaning 'one that recites incantations; exorcist',<sup>309</sup> is not widely used in spoken Gagauz in the context of healing. Instead, the person who practices healing with charms or incantations is referred to as someone who 'reads' as in the following example: *onun karısı okuyêr*, 'his wife reads (incants, uses charms)'. The use of this kind of expression has the effect of diminishing somewhat the significance of the actor; the person is not accorded a title, *okuyucu*, but he/she merely *okuyêr*, 'reads'. Neither is someone who simply 'reads' necessarily accorded the seemingly more honorific title of *ilaççi*. It is somewhat implicit in the title that an *ilaççi* does more than simply 'read'.

The term *okumak*, 'a reading', also a derivative of the verb *okumaa*, has been used by folklorists and ethnographers to refer to the verbal element of healing, the charm or incantation itself.<sup>310</sup> However, the 'readers' themselves, who often prefer to use the Russian term for prayer *molitva* to describe their ritual words, use this term infrequently.<sup>311</sup> The term often does appear in the closing formula of the charms themselves and in this context it indicates that the *okumak* originates with and is the 'property' of the particular *ilaççi* or *okuyucu* in question. As we shall see later, the closing formula has a significant role to play in the charm and the appearance of the word *okumak* here is instructive. Therefore, for the purposes of clarity I shall employ both the terms *okuyucu* for the 'reader' and *okumak* for 'charm/incantation', both of which are gradually becoming current in literary Gagauz, in order to allow us to distinguish the *okuyucu* from the *ilaççi*, and the

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<sup>309</sup> *Türkçe/Osmanlıca-İngilizce Sözlüğü*, İstanbul: Redhouse Yayınevi, 1999.

<sup>310</sup> Notably by N. Baboglu, *Gagauz Folkloru*, Cartea Moldovenească: Chişinău, 1969, pp. 101-102.

<sup>311</sup> The word *molitva* also serves this dual function in Russian usage. See J. Conrad, 'Russian Ritual Incantations: Tradition, Diversity, and Continuity', in *The Slavic and East European Journal*, Vol. 33, No. 3 (1989), p. 422.

*okumak* from the *dua* (prayer, *gag.*) or *molitva* (prayer, *rus.*) of official church practice, which will be covered in the following chapter.

A third term is employed to refer to another specific profession that is connected with the popular healing system of the Gagauz: *ölçü* or 'the diviner'. Again, it is rare to hear this term used in its noun form. Commonly someone is said to *ölçer*: 'he/she determines/divines'. The *ölçü* determines what the cause of a given illness is; whether it is due to *nazar*, 'evil eye', or *büü*, 'black magic'; where a cure for a certain illness is to be found, and the specific *ilaççi* or *okuyucu* that can treat this particular ailment. The *ölçü* is not involved in effecting the actual cure themselves but acts as a first point of call for those concerned to find the right healer and cure for their own or their relative's particular ailment. Often an item of clothing or a personal possession of the patient will be taken to an *ölçü* as an aid for him or her to divine the cause of the illness and the potential cure. Although I didn't have the opportunity to meet an *ölçü*, from the narrative accounts of healings and conversations with patients and healers, they clearly play a vital role in the cultural healing system.

In addition to the above there are a further two related categories of practitioner who generally are not involved with healing practices. They are the *büücü* (male) and *büücüyka* (female), who fit more closely the European model of the witch or wizard: practitioners of magic, often 'black magic' employed to cause harm to local villagers and their livestock. Amongst the Gagauz the term *büü* always implies the use of magic for negative ends; the incantations and spells used in healing, although they might appear to employ the same techniques, are never referred to as *büü*. Healing practices and *büü* are not considered opposites of the same phenomena but entirely different conceptually. In this sense the *ilaççi*, or the *okuyucu* who practises healing, cannot be considered a magician.<sup>312</sup>

Finally, there is the *falçı*, the fortune-teller or diviner. Commonly they are employed to help find lost items, and track down thieves or lost livestock and poultry. Because often the practitioners of each of these specialisations is an elderly woman, the term *babu*, simple meaning old woman, may also sometimes be used to infer that someone has some healing or arcane knowledge.

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<sup>312</sup> This division between positive ritual interventions and negative 'magic' largely corresponds with that outlined by Sachs in regard to the practice of Turkish woman from Kulu in Anatolia. See Sachs, *Evil Eye*, p. 97.

The brief systematisation of the 'professions' and their relevant terminology presented here is the result of observations in a limited number of Gagauz villages and may not be directly applicable in the rest of the ethnic territory of the Gagauz. The distinctions between the various types of practitioner presented here are not clearly conceptualised by the culture bearers themselves and a large degree of fluidity exists between them. In this chapter we shall refer primarily to the careers and practices of the village *ilaççı* and *okuyucu*. The practitioners of these two 'professions' are the healing specialists, and as such are on 'the front line' where popular and official religious practices meet. I employ these categorisations for the purposes of analytical clarity but have endeavoured throughout to remain as close to the Gagauz usage of terms as possible.

The majority of healers I met in *Gagauziya* were female (13 out of a total of 15 interviewed). However, the practice of healing is not a solely female preserve. One theory tries to account for the primary role of women in sphere of 'therapeutic magic' in the region on the basis of their 'interior psychological configuration', which it is argued gives women an inherent inclination towards magic in a world where official religion is dominated by men.<sup>313</sup> Regardless of such arguments, what is clear is that traditional gender roles remain strong in Gagauz society, despite decades of Soviet policy and propaganda aimed at liberating women from limiting circumstances. Therefore the role of women as primary carers for the young, sick and elderly may certainly hold some of the answers to such questions. The significance of gender in the practice of healing remains beyond the scope of the present study.

In Moldova, as in the rest of the Soviet Union, communist ideology demanded the state have ultimate and sole control over the provision of healthcare. However, despite the state's best efforts, choice was present in the form of both 'alternative medicine', in urban areas, and the local traditional forms of magico-religious healing with which we are concerned here.<sup>314</sup> Indeed the folk healer remains an important parallel or complementary route, alongside modern biomedicine, for the local community. Following the break-up of the Soviet Union and the resultant economic crisis the quality and availability of state healthcare provision in Moldova suffered badly. This resulted in a rapid deterioration of

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<sup>313</sup> See C. Burhele, 'Tentațiile feminine ale magicului', in I. Ilie (ed.), *Etnologica*, București: Paideia, 2002, pp. 141-156.

<sup>314</sup> For an outline of the various forms of complementary and alternative medical as well as magical healing that was available in Soviet Russia see G. Lindquist, *Conjuring Hope*, p. 30.

health indicators, which remain amongst the worst in the region.<sup>315</sup> Due to budgetary constraints, medical supplies became scarce and more costly and many doctors either left the country to seek a better living abroad or left the medical profession in the hope of earning a living wage in other more lucrative employment. This situation seems to have increased reliance on local remedies and cures, and on the services of the healers.

Most of the *okuyuculär* I spoke to have certain specialisms relating to the kind of conditions they can treat. They often inherit their *okumak* from family members and they are generally specific to particular illnesses. These tend to be illnesses that have traditional names and causes that can be explained according to the aetiologies of the local belief system. They are conditions that often involve a 'mediated' force. Amongst the most common is *nazar* (to which I too, according to the local diagnosis of my headaches and nausea, fell victim). Belief in the evil eye is common throughout the wider region but the number and variety of *okumak* found in *Gagauziya* specifically to counter its effects demonstrates how ubiquitous is the belief in the destructive power of *nazar*.<sup>316</sup> Amongst the Gagauz *nazar* is considered to be a negative force that can be triggered by envy or admiration, especially of somebody's physical attributes or abilities. Babies and children are considered especially susceptible to the effects of *nazar*. My own 'dose' of *nazar* was attributed to the admiration I 'provoked' by my skills at traditional dancing. The most common symptoms are headaches, sleeplessness, nausea, stomach complaints, listlessness and depression.

One of the most comprehensive studies of beliefs associated with the evil eye sees the eye as a symbolic representation of the sexual organs, most specifically the testicles and breasts, which in turn connects them with the life giving substances of semen and milk.<sup>317</sup> When in Gagauz *okumaklar* the destructive power of *nazar* is diverted back towards its source, it is frequently directed towards to the sexual organs.

If it was man that evil eyed you,  
May his lower regions split!  
If it was a woman that evil eyed you,

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<sup>315</sup> *Economist Intelligence Unit: Moldova Country Profile 2006*, London: Economist Intelligence Unit, 2006, p.16.

<sup>316</sup> On the global nature of belief in the evil eye see J. Roberts, 'Belief in the Evil Eye in World Perspective', in C. Maloney (ed.), *The Evil Eye*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1976, pp. 223-78.

<sup>317</sup> See A. Dundes, 'Wet and Dry, the evil eye', in A. Dundes (ed.), *The Evil Eye: a Casebook*, New York and London: Garland, 1981, pp. 257-312.

May her breasts split!<sup>318</sup>

(Kuru Domniku İvanovna, 06.06.04, village of Gaydar)

Indeed, many Gagauz *okumaklar* are considered so rude that my informants were embarrassed to repeat them; these they termed *en büyük betvası!* - 'The worst curse!' The evil eye is also recognised by the Church as a genuine cause of misfortune and official Romanian Orthodox prayer manuals contain prayers designed to counter its effects.<sup>319</sup>

According to Romanian mythology the *samcă* or *sancă* is a supernatural being, an evil spirit, who inflicts illness especially on the young, sometimes in the form of *strânsură* or 'pressure'.<sup>320</sup> Gorovei also cites the term as a synonym for the devil.<sup>321</sup> Amongst the Gagauz *samka* has a similar meaning: it is described as 'a spirit that is blown around on the wind at dusk looking for victims' or 'an evil thing like a person, a stranger, something that wanders the world'.<sup>322</sup> *Samka* are frequently referred to in Gagauz *okumaklar* as the cause of a kind of spirit possession, which causes illness. As is very common in Romanian incantations the *samka* spirit is most often encountered on the road when setting out on a journey, as the following example shows:<sup>323</sup>

I set out on a long road,  
I came face to face with a big *samka*,  
With a small *samka*,  
*samka*, a baby *samka*,  
A moldovan [female] *samka*,  
With a Russian *samka*,<sup>324</sup>

(Dragoş Anna Vasilievna, 11.02.06, village of Avdarma)

<sup>318</sup> For original Gagauz language text see Appendix 3, text 1.

<sup>319</sup> For example *Rugăciuni pentru Izbăvirea de Vrăji, Farmece, Deochi şi Alte Lucrări Diavoleşti*, Editura Bunavestire: Bacău, 2002.

<sup>320</sup> For a full discussion of the meaning and qualities of *samcă* in Romanian folklore see. T. Pamfile, *Mitologia Românească*, vol. I., Bucureşti, 1997, pp. 237-243, V. Bălceanu, *Dictionar de magic populară românească*, Paideia: Bucharest, 2003, pp. 233-34, and A. Rosetti, *Limba Descântecele Româneşti*, Bucureşti: Editura Minerva, 1975, p. 117.

<sup>321</sup> A. Gorovei, *Descântecele Românilor*, Bucharest, 1931, p. 106.

<sup>322</sup> Dragoş Anna Vasilievna, born 1961, village of Avdarma and Osipova (Hergeleci) İvana (Anna) Stepanovna, Avdarma, born 1931, village of Avdarma.

<sup>323</sup> The Gagauz incantations that refer to *samka* spirits are often very close in terms of form and content to Romanian examples. Compare text 3 from Appendix 2 in this study with the example given in T. Pamfile, *Boli şi leacuri la oameni, vite şi păsări: După datinile şi credinţele poporului român*, Bucureşti: Editura Saeculum, 1999, pp. 170-171.

<sup>324</sup> For original Gagauz language text see Appendix 2, text 3.



The Child-stealing female demon called *Avizuhii*, who has been associated with the figure of Lilith from Jewish folklore and who features in one of the texts presented below, also takes the name of *samcă* in some Romanian variants.<sup>325</sup> Such personified illnesses are also common to Slavic folklore.<sup>326</sup>

Another extremely common diagnosis amongst *okuyuculär* is *korku*, which is a general term for all forms of nervous condition or stress. The word *korku* simply means 'fear' or 'fright' and is cited as the cause, amongst other things, of bed wetting in children, sleeplessness and psychological disturbances. In healing incantations, 'fear' takes on a personified form similar to that of the *samka* described above.

The *ilaççi*, in addition to these common conditions that *okuyuculär* are equipped to counter, is often consulted regarding far more serious conditions. If someone is suspected of suffering from *nazar*, for example, someone in the family may know an *okumak* to counter it or a visit to the local village *okuyucu* may be deemed sufficient to address the problem. However, if the illness is grave or even life-threatening, then relatives may consult an *ölçü* to determine whether there is black magic involved and to direct the patient towards a certain village or a specific *ilaççi* where treatment should be sought. This route is often pursued alongside that of conventional biomedicine. Amongst the conditions *ilaççılär* recalled having treated, were various forms of cancer, schizophrenia and heart disease. Although, as discussed above, there is no clear analytical distinction between the *ilaççi* and a person who simply 'reads', one mark of an *ilaççi* may be his or her willingness to treat more serious medical cases. Success in such cases brings them renown and, as we shall see in the biographies that follow, a combination of effective cures and divine calling or revelation are what seem to attract the title of *ilaççi*.

Belief in the efficacy of the traditional healing system remains strong, not only amongst the rural agrarian population of *Gagauziya* but also amongst professional classes and the nascent middle class. Against my expectations, on one occasion whilst dining with a medical doctor and her family and friends, it came to light that one of the guests, herself in the medical profession, knew some traditional healing charms which she had learnt from

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<sup>325</sup> The full Romanian text can be found in T. Pamfile, *Boli și leacuri*, pp. 171-173. An extract from the Gagauz text is presented in appendix 2, text 10 of this thesis. See also É. Pócs, "Lilith és kísérete." Gyermekágyas-démonoktól védő ráolvasások Délkelet-Európában és a Közel-Keleten, in *Magyar néphit Közép- és Kelet-Európa határán*, Budapest: L'Harmattan, 2002, p. 220.

<sup>326</sup> See Conrad, 'Russian Ritual', p. 425.

her mother. I enquired if she would mind repeating them for me she refused. Slightly embarrassed, she insisted that if she did she would no longer be able to cure her children's headaches and toothaches.

It is commonly accepted that one should pay for the services of an *ilaççı* or *okuyucu*. The standard explanation for the need to pay is *ani ilağ olsun!* 'so that the cure will work.' Even when one healer insisted she never took payment 'because Jesus was never paid', she still advised me that she would accept a kilo of apples or something small as this was 'correct'. On another occasion one *ilaççı* refused payment altogether. However, when I prompted her with the standard remark 'surely you need to be paid *ani ilağ olsun*' she quickly conceded that I was right. The refusal to accept payment may have been due to my being a foreigner whom, she may have assumed, would disapprove of such a practice. The *ilaççı*'s own idea of 'Christian' charity in healing the sick, after the model of Christ, seemed to be at odds in these exchanges with the Gagauz cultural norms that govern the practice of the *ilaççı*.

The efficacy or virtue of the *okumak* is thought to depend, at least partially, on its secrecy. Some village healers were not willing to allow me to hear or record their words. However, others were, and it would seem that my status as a foreigner worked in my favour in a few cases. Often, the concern of the healer seemed to be that local villagers shouldn't come to know that she or he had allowed me to record their *okumak* as this might result in their losing faith in the efficacy of the *okuyucu*'s or *ilaççı*'s cures. I was told on more than one occasion that to record the words on a tape, for example, was an appropriate way to learn the charm, as one can listen to it over and over again and learn it by heart without ever writing it down. The charm should be kept secret but most importantly, especially for anyone wishing to use the charm to heal, it should never be written down or read. From this perspective my tape recorder, which in other situations could be regarded with suspicion, was looked upon in a favourable light.

The healing system, briefly introduced above, includes a whole range of practitioners and practices, which in isolation appear only nominally connected to religion in its 'official' sense, but it is the figure of the *ilaççı* that galvanises most explicitly, through ritual, sacred language and holy visions, the sphere of traditional 'folk' belief and the formal religion of the Orthodox Church. The biographies of the *ilaççılār* and the ritual

interventions described below reveal the dialogical, rather than the oppositional, character of the relationship between lay healing practice and Church Orthodoxy.

#### 4.2 The *İlaççılār*

The three biographical accounts presented below are of healers who have achieved special fame in their local communities and the wider region. They had each attracted the attention of the local media by having performed 'miracle' cures and their fame (in two of the cases) had spread as far as Moscow. Each of them, in recounting her or his personal journey to becoming a healer, placed an emphasis on the relationship established with the divine realm, with either *Allah* or *Panaiya*, and took pains to legitimate her or his calling and practice in relation to not only these powers, but also the activities and structures of the Orthodox Church.

Konstantin Çerven, known affectionately as 'Kosti *batyu*' (uncle Kosti) to local people, is the most highly regarded *ilaççi* in the village of *Kazayak*. He has been practising as a healer for the last 20 years and is the latest in a line of traditional healers in his family. His powers of healing, as the extract below from an article in a local newspaper recounts, have helped many local people.

People came to him after numerous visits to hospitals. What he treats people for doesn't officially exist, it is magic, the evil eye, curses, etc. The result of his prayers and incantations might appear the very next day. Sometime ago his grandmother healed people, then his mother, from whom he inherited this gift. And perhaps one of his children may learn to heal too. But nobody purposefully ever taught anyone to do this – the person had to understand himself, and of course have a special gift from nature.

Even whilst carrying out this non-conventional method of curing, Konstantin Federoviç remains a Christian. The Church doesn't oppose his activity, considering that he is able to help people. Konstantin Çerven even had to cure a rather well-known medical person on one occasion despite the fact that by profession he has been a tractor driver all his life!

Such folk healers can be found in many towns and villages. No matter how they are treated they cure and consider it to be a great sin to refuse a sick person if they feel they can help him. Perhaps the study of their activity by specialists could help us to move away from the materialistic idea of the person's existence

beginning and ending with their material body. It will help us to realise that a person is a complex information-energy system consisting not only of the body and consciousness but mostly of information levels of the subconscious as unknown to us as the rest of the universe.<sup>327</sup>

In the course of the three meetings I had with Kosti *batyu* he told how he came to start healing and explained how he healed the various conditions with which people come to him. At the same time he gave me the customary three treatments to alleviate the recurrent morning headaches from which I was suffering. Kosti *batyu* learnt his healing practices from his mother, who in turn had inherited them from her mother. However, he believes this to be a gift from God to his family: 'The cure comes from God; when Christ was in the world he cured people. God has given me this gift so that I should do the same. It would be a great shame if I were to stop because this comes from God.' Kosti *batyu* hopes that one of his children will carry on in his footsteps, although he will be the one to decide which of them shows the signs of being able to heal, which of them is 'inclined towards spiritual things, believes in God most strongly. What God has put on earth should stay on earth!'

As the newspaper article about Kosti *batyu* states, the Church does not oppose his healing activity. The local priest has told him that as long as he uses only 'the prayers of the Church' he can continue to practise. In response to my enquiries regarding the 'words' that he used in his healing rituals, he said that they were just church prayers, some in Russian and others in Gagauz, there being a prayer to *Kesik Kafalı İvan* (John the Baptist)<sup>328</sup> amongst them, and that he had learnt them from his mother. Kosti *batyu* did not want me to record the words of his *okumak*, which he said should be kept secret otherwise they would lose their power. The only other healer I met in Kazayak was similarly unwilling to let me hear the words to her *okumak*, which I am tempted to suggest may be due to the priest's proviso about healing practice only being acceptable 'if you use the prayers of the Church'. Kosti *batyu* is one of the prominent *kliseclär* of the local Church, as is the other local healer from the village. To guard the secrecy of the canonical prayers

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<sup>327</sup> 'A step into the doorway where the unknown is hidden', *Zname*, 7 January 1996, p. 3.

<sup>328</sup> *Kesik Kafalı İvan* is the colloquial name given to John the Baptist, which literally translates as John the Beheaded.

of the Church, if these are what he uses, from me, or anyone else, did not seem a logical argument to me and I suspected that Kosti *batyu*, like most other healers, was using other forms of prayer not sanctioned by the Church. In conversations I later had with locals about the need for secrecy of *okumak*, it was suggested to me that perhaps the words being used were just nonsense and therefore hidden or whispered to avoid ridicule rather than a loss of sacred power. Despite the high standing and respect shown to figures such as Kosti *batyu* scepticism also crept into these discussions.

As well as treating the commonly occurring *korku* and *nazar*, Kosti *batyu* also claims competency in countering *büü* or black magic, against which he had some cautionary words: 'be warned there are still many people that practise *büü* even here in *Kazayak*!' Kosti *batyu* is known for the power and success of his healing and people come to him from all over *Gagauziya* and even further afield in Moldova. 'A lot of people visit me here, they are sent by *ölçü* from all over. If the sick person cannot visit the *ölçü* themselves, a relative takes an item of their clothing and from that they foretell where and who they should go to for a cure. I had a woman come here from northern Moldova because she was told she would find her cure here in *Kazayak*.'

The village of *Beşgöz*, known to locals as *Kopkoy*, lies 20 kilometres northeast of *Kazayak* and is home to another healer famous in the region. Varvara *bulü* (aunt Varvara) unlike Kosti *batyu*, didn't inherit her gift as an *illaçi* from a parent. After the premature death of her husband she spent many years as a single mother working on the local state farm bringing up her eight children. When she reached 'pensionable age' she started helping neighbours as a midwife and giving massages, and it was then, aged 50, that she had a vision of the Virgin Mary who instructed her to begin healing people.

Panaiya came to me and said that I should read [*okumaa*]; she told me how I should heal [*okumaa*]. 'Wherever you place your hand, there should be a sign that that person will be cured, that person will rise up. Maybe they will mock you, they will beat you, but you shouldn't ever stop'. She [the Virgin Mary] said: 'To you from God will come a piece of iron, with that iron you will cure.'

A few days later she was visited by a priest, a fellow villager by birth but then serving nearby in *Kazayak*, who gave her a broken piece of chandelier from the local church that had been blessed.

And then it came to me in a dream that I should heal people with this piece of chandelier. There was also a piece of cloth with which I also heal. Great things have come from this! And then the children found a horseshoe. I took it to church at Easter and had it blessed, but I hid it in my bag so that no one could see. I also cure people with that. So many have been cured by me, so many!

Varvara *bulü* heals using the items she described whilst also chanting an *okumak* charm (Appendix 2, text no. 7). Similarly to the way she received both her instruction to heal and the implements she uses, she ascribes the words with which she heals directly to *Panaiya*. ‘Nobody taught me, I can’t read, not a single letter! And I don’t know any Russian or Romanian, nothing! [...]. The prayer comes from *Allah*, from me myself and from *Allah*.’ The duality of the origin of healing practice is mirrored in the central refrain of Varvara *bulü*’s healing charm, one commonly used by healers in the region.

*Allahtan imdatın olsun!*<sup>329</sup>  
*Varvaradan okuman olsun!*

From *Allah* comes your cure!  
From Varvara comes your charm!<sup>330</sup>

When asked to explain how this happens, Varvara *bulü* added: ‘I never forget *Allah*, the cure is from *Allah*, I never forget ever!’ We will look more closely at the *okumaklar* used by *illaççılär* later in this chapter but it is worth noting here the emphasis that both Kosti *batyu* and Varvara *bulü* give to the divine origin of their ability to heal and of the healing words themselves.

Varvara *bulü* also recounted for me some instances when her cures had been successful. Amongst her patients had been a nun from a local convent who had been suffering from arthritis; after she had visited her three times and massaged her and ‘read’ for her a charm she was soon able to walk again. A local priest, having seen how miraculously the nun had recovered enquired how she had been cured. The Priest, who had spent twelve years in a concentration camp and had given up searching for relief from

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<sup>329</sup> The word *imdat* is an archaism meaning ‘aid, salvation, assistance’. However, Varvara *bulü* explained the word in this context to mean more literally *ahş* or ‘cure’.

<sup>330</sup> For full text see Appendix 3, text 7.

the pain that the injuries he was inflicted with then were causing him, then too visited Varvara *bulü*. In Vārvara *bulü*'s words, after having been treated by her, he exclaimed, 'Tä, düştän Allahın lafını sana geldi! Brakılmayêrsınız hiç! – The words of God have come to you in a dream! Don't ever stop [healing]!' This same priest, Father Nikolai, according to Varvara *bulü*, was also renowned for his healing activities and healed people in the Church in Bolgrad, 'in exactly the same way I do!'

Healing with the words of *Allah* is a theme that recurs in the account of the third *illaçi*, who is from the village of *Kurçu* (Vinogradovka) just over the border in Ukraine. Galya (whose name has been changed in order to protect her identity) became an *illaçi* under quite different circumstances. She grew up in Kazakhstan where her family lived after being exiled there during the mass deportations of *kulaks*, wealthier peasants or land owners, that the communist considered oppressors of the poor, in the 1940s. At the age of four she fell seriously ill and her parents feared that she would die. As a last resort they called a local Chechen healer, who, after having carried out his healing ritual, told them that if she recovered *olucak okuyucu günün birindä* – 'one day she will become a healer'.

She soon recovered and in 1965 the family was allowed to return to their village in Ukraine. As she was growing up she had recurring visions 'of how I fly up to *Allah* and The Holy Mother'. 'When I would tell my mother about them she would just say, "Oh, you are ill or tired, you should get some rest or maybe you have been frightened by something." My mother, she wasn't a believer you see.' It was not until much later in life that she was told the story of her childhood illness and the prophecy of the Muslim healer.

When I was 35 a woman in the village, *Soni Babu*, whose daughter was very ill, started having dreams. In the dreams she was told not to search any further for a cure but to come to me. They had been to the doctor and the hospital to find a cure for the daughter but nothing had worked. She kept coming to me, pleading with me to come and help. But all the time I was saying there is no reason why I should go, I have no *ilaç* I have no *okumak*! I was afraid of what my husband would say; nobody knew about me then. But they pleaded with me to go so I went and just prayed that *Allah* should heal her. This woman hadn't been able to sleep for a long time and after my first visit she fell asleep straight away for an hour and when she woke she asked for tea. I visited her several times after, maybe seven times in all, before she was cured.'

Even after discovering about her childhood prophecy and being asked to heal by local people, she is reluctant to practise. This is partly due to her husband who is scornful of her healing and in the past has beaten her, telling her that she is 'committing a great sin'. Now she prefers to see only children as she feels sorry for them; any adults she treats she has to see in secret so that her husband won't find out.

When someone comes to her seeking a cure, Galya first performs a divination ritual with egg and water to determine whether she will be able to help with his or her condition or not. If you have a positive sign she prays: 'I pray to Allah, I don't do anything just pray with the words of God, that Allah may cure him or her, that Allah may forgive him or her.' And like Varvara *bulii* she repeats that the cure is not from her alone 'I say to them [people that come to her for a cure] "Don't believe in me, it is both me together with Allah. I can forgive you but what do I know whether Allah will forgive you?" If there is a cure from Allah fine, if not then you have to go somewhere else.' The healing words that Galya repeated for me were Russian canonical prayers which she recites three times but she also alluded to other words: 'In that moment I cannot understand myself, when I go into a state in this way whatever I see I forget immediately, whatever charm I say, this I also forget.'<sup>331</sup>

The above biographical accounts give us an insight into the claims of the *ilaççilär* in terms of both their role as healers and as mediators with the divine and spiritual realms. The transmission of healing words from divine agents or God himself and the divine authority to heal that is imparted through visions, dreams and familial inheritance, are central to their narratives. These narratives circulate in the local community and in the public domain; each of the three *ilaççilär* have been the subject of local media interest and accounts of his or her 'divine calling' are well known.

In order to understand more precisely how this relationship between the healer and the divine functions, in the following pages we will turn our attention to the healing practices themselves. The 'texts' of the healing episodes, recorded from the three *ilaççilär* introduced above and others, will be explored in order to demonstrate the role of language and performance in the establishment of communal 'institutional authority'.

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<sup>331</sup> Here Galya seems to imply that she enters a kind of trance state - *açan girerim bölä nastroenie* 'when I enter this state [of mind] in this way'. The entering of trace states in order to see and converse with the dead is a well reported phenomenon in the territories of what was the Moldavian Principality. In this regard see E. Pócs, 'A magyar halottlátó és a keresztény Európa', in *Magyar néphit Közép- és Kelet-Európa határán. Válogatott tanulmányok I*, Budapest: L'Harmattan, 2002.



## Chapter 5.

### Allahın lafcaazınan okuyêêrim – ‘I heal with the little words of God’: The Language and Performance of Healing Practice

The conceptual relationship between what is termed ‘religious ritual’ and ‘magical practice’ is a complex one. In Eastern Europe the tradition of studying folk healing within the conceptual framework of folklore and ‘magic’ has led to the neglect of the specifically religious aspects of the healing practices traditional to the region.<sup>332</sup> The healing rituals of the Gagauz appear to belong at once to both spheres of action, employing techniques and modes of operation that, according to scholarly convention, could be considered both ‘magical’ and ‘religious’. This kind of healing practice has been termed ‘magico-religious’ by some Eastern European commentators. Hungarian ethnographer Éva Pócs justifies the use of this term in relation to incantations by equating the term ‘magic’ to all attempts to influence something or reach a particular goal by the use of an incantation; she terms this the ‘magic relationship’. Where the text of the charm refers to a third party intermediary to achieve the desired influence she describes it as a ‘religious relationship’. This is in broad agreement with Riesebrodt’s description of a religious practice introduced at the beginning of this thesis (see page 128-29); one that assumes the existence of superhuman powers that can be contacted to influence areas of life that ordinary social actors cannot. The term ‘magico-religious relationship’ Pócs reserves for those occasions when the charm ‘refers’ to a third party whilst also acting to influence directly (through the use of the charm) the given situation. The term ‘magico-religious’ is therefore used to describe a very particular set of relationships that seem to combine two apparently distinct spheres of action.<sup>333</sup> This chapter is primarily concerned with these categorical distinctions and how the ‘texts’ of Gagauz healing in their historical and cultural context, and their performance, inform our understanding of the ‘institutional base’ of healing ritual.

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<sup>332</sup> Some notable exceptions to this are the Hungarian ethnographer Éva Pócs and Romanian Lucia Cireş. See E. Pócs, “‘En vagyok mindennél nagyobb orvos, te vagy mindennél nagyobb bájos’: egyházi benedíkción – paraszti ráolvasás”, in *Magyar néphit Közép- és Kelet-Európa határán. Válogatott tanulmányok I*, Budapest: L’Harmattan, 2002, p. 175, and L. Cireş and L. Berdan, *Descindece din Moldova: Texte Inedite*, Iaşi: Universitatea “A. L. I. Cuza”, 1982.

<sup>333</sup> E. Pócs, *Magyar ráolvasások Vol II*, Budapest: MTA Könyvtára, 1986, pp. 705-706.

Early commentators on magic such as Frazer considered this kind of phenomenon a reflection of a late degenerate phase of magic 'tinged and alloyed' with religion.<sup>334</sup> This view, an affirmation of Frazer's evolutionary model of mankind's progression in cultural stages from the 'magical' through 'religion' to 'science', radically separated 'magic' from 'religion', which was identified as moral, priestly and social in nature. Magic, on the other hand, was seen to be a profane activity, 'not part of the cult of the community of gods',<sup>335</sup> and was, if only in the mind of the anthropologist, considered to hinge on belief in direct causal relationships. As such magic was seen as a deluded science based on misconceived associations and its practitioners were thought to believe in the immediate effect of their magical actions.<sup>336</sup> Although they took quite different approaches to the study of magic and religion, Frazer's followers and contemporaries never fully abandoned the conceptual distinction between the two.<sup>337</sup> Durkheim associated magic with the individual whereas religion he aligned with the social realm. As magic, in Durkheim's view, does not fulfil the social unifying role that he ascribes to religion, it falls outside the functional category of religion into, by implication, some lesser genus.<sup>338</sup> We can see a direct parallel here with the dichotomy between religion and 'folk religion', which operates to separate the 'organised' and social from the 'fluid' and individual. Malinowski, despite rejecting the evolutionary tendencies of Frazer, Durkheim and others, and ascribing a common origin to both magic and religion in 'emotional stress', also, on another level, maintained the distinction between the two fields of practice but based on his understanding that magic always works toward a practical end by manipulating and commanding, whilst religion is based on a more genuine 'communion' with the spirit world and aims for higher 'valuable' ends.<sup>339</sup>

The approach to the study of magic that stems from Frazer, one that led to its being conceptually associated with science, is criticised by Tambiah who realigns magical acts, along with religious ritual, as symbolic action.<sup>340</sup> He comes to this position on the basis of a distinction drawn in theoretical linguistics between descriptive utterances and

<sup>334</sup> Frazer, *The Golden Bough*, p. 48.

<sup>335</sup> M. Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, London: Routledge, p. 21.

<sup>336</sup> Frazer, *The Golden Bough*, p. 11.

<sup>337</sup> Mary Douglas discusses at length Frazer's legacy and his influence on both Malinowski and Durkheim. See Douglas, *Purity*, pp. 7-29 and 60-61.

<sup>338</sup> C. Bell, *Ritual: Perspectives and Dimensions*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997, pp. 47-48.

<sup>339</sup> B. Malinowski, *Magic, Science and Religion*, Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1984, pp. 87-90.

<sup>340</sup> Tambiah, *Culture, Thought and Social Action*, p. 60.

performative utterances, of the kind described in the introduction to this thesis. The former are verifiable as true or false statements, whereas the force of the latter does not rely on a true/false distinction but rather on the validity of the act of performing the utterance. Tambiah starts from the point that 'most "magical rites" (as indeed most rituals) combine word and deed and that the rite is devoted to an "imperative transfer" of effects, which some might phrase as the "telic" and others the "illocutionary" or "performative" nature of the rite'.<sup>341</sup>

Using Evans-Pritchard's and Malinowski's accounts of Azande and Trobriand magic respectively, Tambiah argues that 'it is as a *performative* or "illocutionary" act directed by analogical reasoning that magic acquires its distinctiveness'.<sup>342</sup> Both the words and the actions (together with their associated objects) are said to operate on a level of analogical reference. Words, through simile, metaphor, metonym etc, and objects, on the basis of similarity and difference, affect a 'transfer' of positive qualities or states to someone or something that is flawed or unsound. In taking this approach Tambiah opens the possibility of approaching what have traditionally been classified as 'magical acts' together with other forms of ritual (including religious ritual) without recourse to inherited categorical distinctions. Tambiah's conclusions regarding the 'performative' nature of such acts contributed significantly to the assimilation of the notion of 'performance' in relation to healing in the field of medical anthropology.<sup>343</sup>

Taking Tambiah's lead, in the following pages we will examine the healing rituals of the Gagauz on the level of 'word' and, to a lesser degree, 'action' (including the use of material substances or tools). These two elements seem to operate, as Tambiah observed in regard to Azande and Trobriand magic, in various 'analogical' modes in order to achieve the desired 'transfer'. In addition to the 'illocutionary' frame, which determines the power of a speech act, Tambiah identifies a second 'frame', which he terms 'predictive'. This aspect, which relates to the attribution and transfer of qualities, is useful in Csordas's view 'as long as we recognise that the illocutionary act bears an aura of prediction, and that the performance of metaphors carries illocutionary force. It expands

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<sup>341</sup> Ibid., pp. 78-79.

<sup>342</sup> Ibid., p. 81.

<sup>343</sup> T. Csordas, 'Imaginal Performance and Memory in Ritual Healing', in C. Laderman, M. Roseman (eds.), *The Performance of Healing*, New York and London: Routledge, 1996, p. 93.

the notion of the 'performative act' to explicitly include the performance of metaphor...'.<sup>344</sup>

These two frames appear in a whole spectrum of Gagauz ritual healing practice that spans conventional categorical distinctions between 'popular' or 'folk' practice and official church practice. The 'texts' and 'objects' employed in healing are the 'products' of processes of institutionalisation of religious 'facts' established between and through the activities of religious actors, both lay and clerical. The 'dialectic' between the various modes of healing practice has its basis in historical and cultural processes that cannot be fully elucidated here. However, under the headings 'ritual word' and 'ritual action' below, we shall take some key examples in order to demonstrate the *modus operandi* of Gagauz healing practices and institutional bases. However, in doing so our prime concern remains the relationship between the healer and the divine, not the healing act *per se*. The words and actions of the healing practices are important indicators of the norms and rules that give healing its institutional form. Understanding the semantics of the ritual acts in their cultural context will serve to give flesh to the biographical accounts of the *ilaççilär* we met above regarding their contacts with the divine and spiritual beings. This in turn sheds light on the origins of the healers' authority to practise and their agency to act in the religious sphere.

The examples of healing 'texts' presented below were embedded within the conversations I had with the three *ilaççilär* introduced in the previous chapter and the actual healing 'episodes' that I witnessed. These have been supplemented with examples of *okumak* charms from other Gagauz healers in order to illustrate specific points.

### 5.1 The 'Texts' of Gagauz Healing Practices

The healing practices of the Gagauz, in my experience, always include a verbal element and this component of the healing ritual often contains direct reference to transcendental powers or spiritual beings. In fact studies of the various forms of verbal healing rituals in Europe have revealed their diverse connections with church exorcism texts, apocryphal literature and canonical prayer, as well as archaic folk formulas. The 'texts' presented here are from recordings of 'oral' speech acts and therefore do not represent 'ideal' or 'perfect'

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<sup>344</sup> Ibid.

types; they are fixed in print here most probably for the first time. They are the ‘texts’ that ‘happened’ at a particular place and time during our encounter and they fell within the context of practices and the conversations that followed that I initiated to elucidate ‘data’ on healing charms. Therefore the ‘formality’ and ‘fixedness’ that they take on in the context of this study is contingent on many factors. The study that follows is very much a snapshot from a certain perspective through a lens designed to help answer specific research questions and this process has determined the form in which these *okumak* charms appear in this study.

The verbal or speech components of Gagauz healing rituals have been little studied and their place within the broader field of ‘folk’ medicine or the healing system of the Gagauz also remains a neglected field.<sup>345</sup> In 1989 Joseph Conrad reflected on the ‘continuing ambivalence’ of Soviet ethnographers toward magic incantations (a category which includes healing charms); something which is only just beginning to be addressed in the post-Soviet era.<sup>346</sup> However, in other Central and Eastern European countries charms and incantations have attracted more systematic treatment by ethnographers and folklorists, which has resulted in the publication of large collections of ‘charms’ and some important scholarly analysis upon which the present study draws. The Gagauz textual material presented in this chapter displays many discursive and narrative similarities with Romanian charms and to a lesser extent with Hungarian, Bulgarian and Russian material.<sup>347</sup>

Tambiah, in his study on the role of words in magic, points out that the effectiveness of ritual is very often located, according to the culture bearers themselves, in

<sup>345</sup> Two notable exceptions are Arnaut’s article on folk medicine, T. Arnaut, ‘Gagauzlar’da Halk Hekimliği’, *Sabaa Yıldızı*, 2001, pp. 38-41, and three examples of Gagauz ‘charms’ published in N. Baboglu, *Gagauz Folkloru*, Cartea Moldovenească: Chişinău, 1969, pp. 101-102.

<sup>346</sup> Conrad, ‘Russian Ritual’, p. 422. Despite the large number of collections of charms from the Orthodox East Slav territories there are only a limited number of serious studies. On this note see W. Ryan, ‘Eclecticism in the Russian Charm Tradition’, in J. Roper (ed.), *Charms and Charming in Europe*, Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2004, pp. 113-127. For a full survey of Russian magic and charm traditions see W. Ryan, *The Bathhouse at Midnight: an Historical Survey of Magic and Divination in Russia*, Stroud: Sutton Publishing, 1999.

<sup>347</sup> For a systematic treatment of Romanian ‘charms’ see: A. Gorovei, *Descântelele Românilor*, Bucharest, 1931 and Cireş, L., Berdan, L., *Descântele din Moldova: Texte Inedite*, Iaşi: Universitatea “A. L. I. Cuza”, 1982. Hungarian ethnographer Éva Pócs has produced two comprehensive collections of Hungarian Charms, the first in two volumes. See É. Pócs, *Magyar ráolvasások (2 Vols)*, Budapest: MTA Könyvtára, 1985 and 1986, and É. Pócs, *Szem meglátott szív megvert*, Gyula: Helikon Kiadó, 1986. Joseph Conrad has produced short introductory surveys of Bulgarian and Russian incantations, see Conrad, ‘Russian Ritual Incantations’, and J. Conrad, ‘Bulgarian Magic Charms: Ritual, Form, and Content’, in *The Slavic and East European Journal*, Vol. 31, No. 4, pp. 548-562.

the power of 'words'. The 'words' of ritual, he adds, cannot be considered 'an undifferentiated category', for rituals employ a whole range of verbal forms.<sup>348</sup> Such is the case with Gagauz healing rituals, which employ 'utterances' that fall under categories that we would recognise such as prayer, spell, mythical narrative and blessing. This verbal element of the healing practices is referred to as *okumak* by Gagauz folklorists, a term which is roughly analogous with the 'charm' or 'incantation' of English folklore. As mentioned in the previous chapter, practitioners themselves do not commonly employ the term *okumak* to refer to their healing words. They use more frequently the Russian term *molitva*, meaning 'prayer'. However, the term *okumak* often appears within the text itself (see for example Appendix 3, texts 3 and 7) to refer simultaneously to the healing act and the 'text' of the practice. For the purposes of this study the phrase is a useful one as it can be employed as an umbrella term for the various types of speech act or 'text' that are used in the context of healing, whilst at the same time remaining in line with recent Gagauz literary convention.

As a genre of folklore, a 'charm' or 'incantation' is defined not by its semantic content or structure but rather by function. That function is to influence in a positive or negative way one or other aspect of everyday life; that is, to achieve a goal determined by a concrete personal need.<sup>349</sup> Thus the required goal of the *okumak*, the bringing of luck or health or of intervening in a given situation, is the defining factor of this genre. In this way, when we refer to the textual element of the 'healing' we should be aware that it is defined as *okumak*, solely by the function of the spoken formula rather than by any particular defining feature of the words or text. This is why an *okumak* may in fact be a text with any kind of structural form or discursive content: it may be a liturgical prayer, a hymn, or indeed any other kind of verbal utterance.<sup>350</sup> We will return to this issue again in chapter 7 when discussing prayer.

The distinction between prayer and 'charm' often becomes blurred, especially when 'charm' text formulas appear to be deprecatory in nature, calling on the intercession of superhuman powers in much the same way as official prayers of the Church. As we discussed above, the need to categorise and reject 'folk' religious phenomena is historically linked to an agenda of suppression and control. The kind of categorical

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<sup>348</sup> Tambiah, *Culture, Thought*, p. 18.

<sup>349</sup> Pócs, *Szem meglátott*, p. 243.

<sup>350</sup> *ibid*, p. 243.

confusion that results stems from a basic failure to recognise that the act of 'saying' words and the discursive content or meaning of words do not always convey the same intent or achieve the same result. In the past, collections of charms have often been divorced from the context of their performance and researchers have sought to understand them from the free-floating 'text' alone.

Gagauz charms, as we will observe below, often operate on several different levels. It is precisely this blurring of the boundaries that appears in *okumak* that provokes us to seek a means of transcending the Frazerian assignments of a 'spell' as a mechanical manipulation and a 'prayer' a supplication of divine beings, as radically different kinds of communication with the supernatural, one which also led to 'magic' being relegated to an inferior position in relation to religion.<sup>351</sup>

In the following pages we will examine the *modus operandi* of Gagauz healing 'texts', on what pragmatic and semantic level they function, paying particular attention to how and why divine or spiritual powers are referenced in the speech acts and what their role is shown to be in the healing process. This will inform our understanding of the relationship between healer, patient and divine agent. The performance of the ritual should be considered as instrumental in the sense that it is performed in order to affect a cure, but at the same time the performance also produces the objects of religious knowledge or religious institutional facts through the experience of both the healer and the patient. If we return to the example of Holy Water cited in the introduction to this thesis, we can see how the performance alters the status of ordinary water and how those participating in the ritual then recognise and continue to treat the water as Holy Water, thus establishing a religious institutional fact. The act of healing is a religious 'episode' that operates in the same way; religious knowledge is enacted and transmitted and authority is elicited and acknowledged through words and actions.

Therefore, in our analysis it is important that we do not divorce the verbal element of the charms from their context in community and the 'insights' of the healers themselves. The speech acts performed during the healing are ascribed a divine origin by the *ilaççilâr* and in some cases are considered to be the actual words of *Allah* or *Panaiya*. Whether the 'words' are orally transmitted 'traditional' formulas, divinely 'prescribed' in visions, improvised compositions, or canonical prayers, all of which occur amongst Gagauz, may

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<sup>351</sup> Frazer, *The Golden*, pp. 48-60.

effect the way in which the observer 'reads' or understands the role of divine or spiritual agents in the method of healing. Perhaps more significantly this also helps shape what the person being treated believes the role of these agents to be in this process. The power of the 'words' therefore is very much dependant on their relationship to the healer and the divine, which is only partially revealed in a reading of the texts. The biographies and testimonies of the *ilaççılār* are therefore indispensable when trying to understand how their speech acts bridge the cosmological register between divine and worldly realms and how performance both institutes religious 'facts', through illocutionary force, and also, more indirectly influences or persuades through the perlocutionary dimension of speech.

In the following pages we will examine a selection of the verbal forms encountered in the healing rituals and explore their *modus operandi* in relation to the spiritual beings they invoke. In order for us to approach the very diverse elements found in the *okumak* charms it is necessary to employ some form of categorization. The following classifications are useful to distinguish, in the broadest terms, the most common elements found in healing charms employed by *ilaççılār*. Each of the following categories are presented in turn: the simple formula, the 'epic' or 'mythic' narrative formula; the ratification formula; and finally special mention is also made of apocryphal and semi-official church texts such as the apocryphal legend *Panaiyan düşü*, which was introduced briefly in the previous chapter. The elements presented here are not intended as an exhaustive study of Gagauz healing charms but have been selected with the intention of highlighting the specific aspect in question; how the vehicle of language and acts of speech relate to the agency of the human and divine actors in the healing ritual.

#### 5.1.1 The Simple Charm

The title of this category is somewhat deceptive as these charms are often far from simple in terms of structure, content or mode of operation. However, they are referred to thus purely on the basis that they seemingly operate in a 'profane' mode without direct reference to divine or spiritual beings. The techniques they employ - amongst which we find command, negation, and counting formulas that often utilise analogy and metaphor - are commonly characterised as purely 'magical'. Also, amongst the Gagauz, they are most often employed in the healing of some of the most common 'simple' ailments such as



*nazar*, *korku* and *pêr* outlined above. In the author's experience they are not the favoured verbal tool of the *ilaççi*, but seem to belong to the more common sphere of the *okuyucu*. Therefore, we shall restrict ourselves to the presentation of just a couple of examples I recorded in the field, the first being specifically against the evil eye or *nazar*.

If the blue-eyed one gave you the Evil-eye,  
If the blue-eyed one gave you the Evil-eye,  
Evil-eye perish!  
If the green-eyed one gave you the evil-eye,  
Evil-eye perish!  
If the red-eyed one gave you the evil-eye,  
Evil-eye perish!  
If the yellow-eyed one gave you the evil-eye,  
Evil-eye perish!  
If a man gave you the evil-eye,  
May his private parts wither!  
If a woman gave you the evil-eye,  
May her breasts wither!  
- This is the greatest curse!

(Kuru Domniku İvanovna, 09.06.04, village of Gaidar, see  
Appendix 3, Text 1)

This kind of *okumak* employs a 'command' formula which operates by identifying the source of the *nazar* in a process of elimination and then by simply commanding it to perish.<sup>352</sup> This common kind of formula doesn't call on spiritual beings in order to achieve a cure, but simply relies on identification, the performative power of the 'words' and the accompanying ritual actions. However, this kind of 'magic' charm can also be brought into a Christian frame by adding an invocation at the beginning and a supplication to *Allah*, Jesus or *Panaiya* and a ratification formula at the end. This is not necessarily a conscious decision on the part of the healer to alter a 'profane' text to make it 'sacred' but appears to be the convention during healing.

In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Ghost.  
Little bird, Little bird,  
You were born in the autumn,

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<sup>352</sup> Conrad, Pócs and Gorovei, in relation to Russian, Romanian, and Hungarian charms respectively, present several categories and sub-categories of charm of the 'command' or 'imperative' kind, which are determined by their specific semantic structure. See Conrad, 'Russian', Pócs, *Szem meglátott*, Gorovei, *Descîntecele*.

You grew up in the autumn,  
You flew high in the sky,  
Your little wings became poisoned.  
It dripped on a branch, the branch cracked,  
It dripped on a rock, the rock split.  
Who gave İvankacık the evil-eye?  
İvankacık has been baptised!  
From every grain to every bone,  
From *Allah*, from *Panaiya* be cured!

(İngilis Mariya Petrovna, 08.06.04, village of Beşalma, see  
Appendix 3, Text 2)

The above example uses a rather oblique analogy, which associates the *nazar* with an impossible or unnatural occurrence in nature. This is followed by an exclamation of the protective power of baptism to avert the influence of such freak phenomena. *Allah* and *Panaiya* are invoked at the end as the source of the cure. *Okumak* with this degree of Christian framing are very common. However, the following category is characterised by what is considered to be a more complete fusion of Christian imagery with ‘folk’ mythic symbolism. It is one in which divine actors are seen to take on a more direct role in the mechanism of the healing ritual and are often imbued with clear material or corporeal qualities.

#### 5.1.2 ‘Epic’ or Narrative Charms

The terms ‘epic charm’ or ‘narrative charm’ have been employed by ethnographers to describe charms with a historic or mythological narrative content, which are based on analogical magic.<sup>353</sup> They are described as such because the power of the magic relies on an analogy with a narrative ‘epic’ account of a mythic healing or exorcism, which was effected in the past. Keith Thomas states in relation to English charms that ‘they reflected the ancient belief that mythical events could be a timeless source of supernatural power.’ The successful past event on which the analogy is based often derives from an episode in the gospels and Thomas goes on to present an example of an 18<sup>th</sup> century healing charm

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<sup>353</sup> Detailed descriptions of the historical development and functional components of this group of charms can be found in: Pócs, *Szem meglátott*, pp. 265-269, Pócs, *Magyar Ráolvasások*, vol II, pp. 724-726, and Gorovei, *Descîntecele*, pp. 175-190.

that uses Christ's baptism in the river Jordan as the source of the power.<sup>354</sup> The employment of mythic Christian tales in healing charms is a widespread and possibly very ancient tradition. Amongst the Gagauz such healing incantations often begin with the words '*İsus Hristos çeketmiş bir uzun yola...*', 'Jesus Christ set out on a long road...', and continue by recounting a meeting between Jesus and a demon, devil or one of the illnesses in personified form introduced in the previous chapter, whilst on the journey. Such texts often appear to have demonstrable links with specific healings or exorcisms performed by Jesus in the Gospels. Epic formulas of this type are common to most European peoples and are also often found as 'semi-official' church texts.

The question of the historical relationship between 'Epic' narrative charms and Church exorcism and benediction texts is a very complex one. As we have already highlighted, 'ecclesiastical polemics' have been a determining factor in the development of scholarship on healing in general and charming in particular. In the West already during the Middle Ages we witness what seems to be the imitation of Church benediction texts in the practices of traditional healers, a process which speeded up with the translation of Church texts from Latin into the vernacular in modern times.<sup>355</sup> However, the influence was not in one direction only, as Pócs points out: 'Religion fought using the weapons of magic, and magic too placed in its armoury tools with a similar function to those of religion'.<sup>356</sup> There are reports that in Orthodox lands this two-way process was aided by the monasteries. For example, Krauss shows evidence that monks in Bulgarian monasteries played a role in modifying, editing and disseminating folk charms.<sup>357</sup> This is consistent with the picture we gained in the previous chapter regarding the role of the monasteries in Moldova today in the dissemination of the apocryphal *epistoliyas*. We shall return to the role of monasteries in relation to healing and to the question of the formal and structural similarity between 'epic' folk charms and Church benediction and exorcism texts that resulted from this process later in this chapter.

Gagauz 'epic' charms are themselves often made up of several elements that operate on different semantic and 'performative' levels. In addition to the analogical

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<sup>354</sup> K. Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, London: Penguin Books, 1991, p. 212.

<sup>355</sup> Pócs, 'Én vagyok mindennél', p. 175.

<sup>356</sup> Ibid., p.176.

<sup>357</sup> See F. Krauss, *Volksglaube und religiöser Brauch der Südslaven*, Münster, 1890, p. 46. Pócs also points to other evidence in this regard, see *ibid.*

narrative formula described above, the Gagauz *ilaççı* and *okuyucu* may also introduce 'imaginal' episodes or journeys that intersect or enhance the primary narrative account, and employ enumeration and command formulas with the aim of gaining power over demons, illness spirits and the like.

The most common type of 'epic' *okumak* contains a combination of three elements: the journey, the subsequent meeting with and defeat of evil forces, and finally the banishment or expulsion formula. The combination is possibly the most archaic type of 'epic charm' found in Europe with extant manuscripts in Latin, Greek and German dating from the third to the thirteenth centuries.<sup>358</sup> Gagauz 'epic' *okumaklar* commonly begin with Jesus, *Panaiya* or some other biblical or saintly figure setting out on a journey. Often this journey takes the protagonist to or from Mount *Eleon*, traditionally considered the site of Christ's ascension, to the river Jordan or to Jerusalem, as in this example:

Jesus Christ set out on a long road.  
Whilst on the road he came to a large hill,  
Passing the large hill he came to a large field,  
In this large field, in the field of Jerusalem...

(Kapsomun Kristina Stepanovna, 29.04.06, village of *Avdarma*,  
see Appendix 3, Text 4.)

At this point in the *okumak* events unfold that lead to a healing, banishing or exorcism. Sometimes these are in the form of a simple analogy. One such example is where Jesus creates a large well and calls all sick people in the neighbourhood to come and be blessed. He then blesses them with water from the Jordan and they are cured and depart.

In the fields of Jerusalem he dug a big well.  
He blessed nine baskets with holy water from the river Jordan,  
He called all of the sick,  
To wash, to cleanse.  
Everybody came, they washed and were cleansed.  
Those that couldn't see, saw and departed,  
Those that couldn't hear, heard and departed,  
Those that were ill were cured and departed,  
Those whose stomachs ached were cured and departed,  
Those whose backs ached were cured and departed,  
Those with colic were cured and departed,

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<sup>358</sup> Pócs, *Szem meglátott*, p. 265.

Jesus Christ blessed everyone,  
Everyone was cured and then departed...

(Evdokiya Feoderovna Kristova, 11.02.06, village of *Avdarma*, see  
Appendix 3, text 5)

Such charms employ the power of the analogy to effect the cure. However, many 'epic' charms recount the meeting of the forces of good with the forces of evil and the healing analogy in such cases takes on a more complicated format. The simple power of the words of the analogy in the first example, are reinforced by the additional knowledge and power of the healer.

In the example below, which comes from the same *ilaççi* that treated my foot (see page 141), Jesus himself is sent by *Panaiya* to the *ilaççi* to be consoled and to learn the secret of the healing: 'She [The Mother of God] said to him go to Dunya so that she can read for you'. The *ilaççi*, in this case called Dunya, becomes the direct agent of *Panaiya*, both at the time of the original mythic event and in 'present time', thus reassuring the patient of the *ilaççi*'s credentials. Dunya is in possession of special arcane knowledge which helped even Jesus in his time of need.

5.                   He [Jesus] arrived at a big bridge.  
                      Under the bridge 'wickedness' was living.  
                      There was no one there, they were all afraid,  
                      Jesus Christ shouted,  
                      But nobody heard, he shouted, he screamed.  
                      The Mother of God heard.  
                      She said to him go to Dunya [the name of the *ilaççi*]  
                      So that she can read for you [use her charm on you]  
                      - Yes, go to Dunya she will read for you.  
                      With your sweet mouth speak,  
                      With you sweet hands console.  
                      Straight away Dunya started to speak, to console.  
                      At once Jesus came with his knife,  
                      With his axe, with his rake,  
                      He cut with his knife,  
                      He chopped with his axe,  
                      He pulled with his rake.  
                      From every vein, from every bone was extracted,  
                      Every illness from his [*başlık*] he took.  
                      From everyplace it [the illness] was carried, flowed.  
                      It fled to the Black Sea, with [*saylêrlan*], with water,  
                      To the mountains,

To the rocks,  
To the desolate places,  
- So it was-  
Amen.

(Evdokiya Feoderovna Kristova, 11.02.06, village of *Avdarma*, see  
Appendix 3, Text 5)

In another example, which introduces an 'imaginal' type journey undertaken by the *ilaççi* and the divine agent, we hear an expression of the directness of the relationship between the *ilaççi* and *Panaiya*.

6. I set out on a long road,  
I came face to face with a big *samka*,  
With a small *samka*,  
*Samka*, a baby *samka*,  
A moldovan [female] *samka*,  
With a Russian *samka*,  
With a German *samka*,  
With a Latvian *samka*,  
With an American *samka*,  
With an Italian *samka*,  
With a Greek *samka*,  
With a Turkish *samka*,  
With an Uzbek *samka*,  
With a Greek *samka*.  
He took me by the wing,  
Threw me to the ground,  
Blackened my eye,  
Turned my face green.  
Nobody saw, nobody heard,  
Only you my dear *Panaiya*.  
From the gates of heaven you saw and said:  
'Why don't you sleep Ana?  
Why don't you [rest] like sweet *Panaiya*.'  
I set out on a long road,  
I came face to face with a big *samka*,  
With a small *samka*,  
He took me by the wing,  
Threw me to the ground,  
Blackened my eye,  
Turned my face green,  
Nobody saw, nobody heard,  
Only you my dear *Panaiya*,

From the gates of heaven you saw and said:  
 'Hush, Ana don't cry!  
 I shall take you by the hand,  
 And take you to Tatiana [the name of the *ilaççi*]  
 Tatiana will read for you [cure you]  
 Just as surely as she takes you by the hand now.  
 And you will stay pure just as *Allah* left you,  
 And just as your mother made you,  
 From me the *okumak*,  
 From *Allah* the cure.  
 [Followed by the Lord's Prayer]

(Dragoş Ana Vasilievna, 11.02.06, village of *Avdarma*, see Appendix 3, Text 6)

What is remarkable about this *okumak* is not the analogical narrative account but the way it is intersected by the imaginal episode in which the healer and patient engage with the existential and physical presence of the divine.<sup>359</sup> In the images and narrative of the text that the *ilaççi* delivers we witness a portrayal of the nature of the relationship between *Panaiya*, the patient and the *ilaççi*. *Panaiya* is represented as having an intimate knowledge of the *ilaççi* and her powers and she also enters a direct kinaesthetic and sensory relationship with the patient. *Panaiya* takes the patient by the hand and leads her to the *ilaççi*, reassuring the patient and affirming the certainty of the cure, which is said to be as real and as sure as the *ilaççi*'s own touch, which the patient is experiencing directly at the time of the healing ritual. Such episodes or sequences can be said to constitute a 'performative act', which initiate the therapeutic process. Csordas, in his study of Catholic Charismatic healing, refers to the use of images introduced by the Charismatic healers as 'revelatory' and identifies them as being connected to 'charisms' or spiritual gifts. These appear comparable to the images that our *ilaççilär* receive via divine visions and instructions or as inherited 'gifts' from parents, grandparents or other close relations and which are then related by the *ilaççi* to the patient. The 'therapeutic' imagery, which Csordas locates with the patient and which he states may arise 'spontaneously or in the form of guided imagery, active imagination, or meditation' relate to the patient's inner experience of healing stimulated by the healer and his or her words.<sup>360</sup> In the examples of

<sup>359</sup> This element of epic charms also displays some affinity with the closing formula of the 'folk' prayers that are explored in chapter seven (see page 241-245).

<sup>360</sup> Csordas, 'Imaginal Performance', p. 101.

*okumaklar* given above the *ilaççi* guides the patient on an imaginal and sensory journey to a state of purity. It is the elaboration on the part of the patient on this 'suggestive' or 'guided' imagery that can be regarded as the therapeutic element of the healing ritual.

Although it is not our aim here to investigate directly such healing processes or the efficacy of cures, elaborating these processes and recognising the saliency of the experience of the patient in the sequences described above is essential if we are to understand the power of traditional healing episodes to 'institute' religious facts, and the role of language in the establishment of the authority of the *ilaççi*. The formal narrative of the healing practice, in our case the 'performance' of the *ilaççi*, is only one layer or element that may encompass several 'performances within performances', each of which may persuade and strengthen the belief of the patient in the *ilaççi* but also of the *ilaççi* in her own powers and connection with the divine actors that are called upon during the healing rituals.<sup>361</sup>

Returning once more to our analysis of the various modes in operation in the healing practices of the *ilaççi*, in addition to the analogical and the imaginal frames outlined above, there is a third component that in some sense relates to 'arcane' or secret knowledge at the disposal of the *ilaççi* or the divine agent that has been summoned to the healing. Pócs connects these elements with the 'magic function' rather than with the religious. Amongst the Gagauz these appear in two basic forms: that of 'enumeration'; the listing of the characteristics, names or places of origin of the illness or demon, and 'banishing' or commanding the illness or demon; sending it somewhere else, naming that place and its characteristics.<sup>362</sup> Both of these elements of 'epic' charms have a long historical pedigree and share many similarities with Church exorcism and benediction texts.

We have already seen 'enumeration' in operation in two of the texts presented above: text 1 against the evil eye lists the possible eye colour of the person that caused the *nazar* and in text 6 the *ilaççi* searches through a list of possible nationalities of the *samka* that was afflicting my foot at the time. This process appears as a form of diagnosis and once the illness or demon has been identified by the *ilaççi*, knowledge of its name or characteristics magically disarms it and renders it harmless.

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<sup>361</sup> Ibid., pp. 94-95.

<sup>362</sup> Pócs, *Magyar Ráolvasások*, p. 707.



The second element of the magic component is also of demonstrably ancient origins. The banishing of demons to the ocean, rocky places, forests, and locations far from human inhabitation is common across Europe and is found in ancient magical texts of the Near East and especially in Hellenistic demon-banishing texts. From there it seems this motif also spread to Byzantine and Roman Christian texts. In medieval church sources such desolate or uninhabited places are referred to as Satan's home and he is sent back there in many Church benediction and exorcism texts.<sup>363</sup> The Bible too may be a direct source of such notions. Jesus himself is quoted as saying in the Gospel of Luke that when an evil spirit leaves a man it 'goes through dry places seeking rest' (Luke 11:24). The following example is typical of Gagauz 'banishing' formulas.

And go to the mountains,  
To the rocks,  
Where birds don't fly,  
Where priests don't go,  
Where flowers don't grow.

(Young woman, village of *Kongaz*, noted on 05.03.06)

These last two elements within the body of the epic charms rely on the 'performative' power of the words uttered by the *ilaççi* and represent a third 'mode' by which the *okumak* and the healing ritual may achieve its intended aim.

### 5.1.3 Ratification Formulas: The affirmation of the role of the divine

It remains now only to examine how the verbal aspect of the healing is closed. Many of the *okumak* that we have met above end with a formula that affirms or ratifies the origin of the events, images and experiences elucidated in the charm. This formula may take several forms, the most common of which is a two-line couplet that affirms the role of the divine, in most cases *Allah* but also sometimes accompanied by *Panaiya*, and the *ilaççi* in the healing process.

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<sup>363</sup> Pócs, *Szem meglátott*, p. 255.

The Romanian poet Lucian Blaga in his study of magical thought portrays the role of divine beings in Romanian magic as both indispensable and regulatory.<sup>364</sup> In Romanian folklore divine beings, thanks to their *intropatie* or 'empathy', routinely descend to earth with the aim of curing the sick and resolving mankind's problems. However, according to Blaga's interpretation, divine force is insufficient without the power of magic, because divine force can be exercised only through the medium of the *descântator*, the user of magic charms or incantations. The *descântator* creates the portal through which the divine can descend on the 'golden staircase' from the celestial realm, as *Panaiya* does in the imaginal journey recounted above. This magic power can, in turn, be counteracted or overturned by the divinity if he or she so wills it. Therefore only the 'consensus' of both principles actuates the cure. Cireş demonstrates the interdependence of these two factors, magical and religious, using the example of the closing formulas common to Romanian charms: 'From me comes the cure, from God comes health', 'The cure is from God, the words are from me'.<sup>365</sup> Gagauz charms often also end with an identical expression of the dual principles involved in the healing ritual.

*Bendän okuması,  
Allahtan da ilaççı.*

From me the charm,  
From Allah the cure.<sup>366</sup>

And Vavara *bulü* closes each verse of her *okumak* with the refrain,

*Allahtan imdatın olsun!  
Varvaratan okuman olsun!*

May the cure come from Allah!  
From Varvara comes the charm!<sup>367</sup>

It is also interesting to note that by the introduction of *Allah*, the supreme deity, at the end of the *okumak* a third power is introduced, after that of *Panaiya* (or Jesus), who is invoked

<sup>364</sup> L. Blaga, *Gîndire Magică şi Religie Trilogia Valorilor II*, Bucureşti: Humanitas, 1996, pp. 156-160.

<sup>365</sup> Cireş, *Descîntece din Moldova*, p. vi.

<sup>366</sup> From Appendix 3, text 3.

<sup>367</sup> From Appendix 3, text 7.

in the body of the charm, and the *ilaççi*. The representation of a divine duality, of a lesser and higher divinity, in the appeals to God through prayer, according to Lang, can be traced back to the earliest examples of Christian prayer where it is the 'name of Jesus' that is most commonly invoked. The invocation of the 'name of Jesus' can be interpreted in two ways. The first of which is based on the tradition of using names associated with the divine as a source of magical power. As Lang points out, according to the Gospel of Mark, exorcists expelled demons 'in the name of Jesus' (Mark 9:38). However, it may be that Jesus is invoked in another role. Christian prayer, which is addressed in the first place to God, may also adduce the name of Jesus using the term 'through Jesus Christ'. Here Jesus appears in the role of intercessor or mediator with God. Lang argues that early Christians thought of Jesus as a second deity who had been delegated some powers by the supreme God and who fulfilled the function that previously was held by Semitic personal deities.<sup>368</sup> In a similar vein the following refrain is also found within some Gagauz *okumak*.

*Allahtan, Panaiyadan imdat!*<sup>369</sup>

From Allah, from Panaiya the cure!

Only in one occasion could I record all three principle actors listed at the end of the *okumak*. In this case the *ilaççi* affirms her role as source of the charm, *Allah* as the source of *imdat*, which in this case perhaps we may read with its original meaning of salvation or aid, and finally Jesus Christ is accredited with the cure itself, the *ilacı*.

*Bändän okuması,  
Allahtan da imdat,  
İsus Hristosdan da ilacı!*<sup>370</sup>

From me the charm,  
From Allah salvation,  
From Jesus Christ the cure!

<sup>368</sup> B. Lang, *Sacred Games: A History of Christian Worship*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1997, p. 104-109.

<sup>369</sup> From charm no. 3, appendix 2.

<sup>370</sup> Osipova (Hergeleci) İvana (Ana) Stepanovna, born 1931, village of Avdarma, recorded 25.04.06).

As we discussed above, village healers also often close their charms with official Church formulas such as 'In the name of the Father, the Son and Holy Ghost', either in Romanian or Slavonic but very rarely in Gagauz, or simply with 'Amen'. One point worth noting is that the Holy Spirit never finds its way into the non-canonical folk formulas and only occurs where directly paraphrased from liturgical prayer. Secondly, what is also noteworthy is that the ratification formulas of the type introduced above are, in every instance I recorded, missing from *okumak* 'sealed' using a canonical formula. The two types of closing formula are either mutually exclusive or fulfil the same function.

As we have seen with other elements of epic charms, the closing formula also operates on several levels at once. The supreme deity is invoked as the arbiter, the ultimate source of *imdat*, the *ilaççi* we are reminded is the channel by which divine favour can be tapped, and finally *Panaiya* or Jesus Christ is the intercessor, the lesser deity that has the 'ear' of God and can also manifest in the world. Also, where *Panaiya* and Jesus are invoked it may be considered an attempt to deploy the power that is invested in the 'name' of the divinity.

The cosmology that is encapsulated in these closing formulas echoes the accounts of the *ilaççilär* themselves regarding their connection with the divine. They profess to a special gift or calling, an indispensable ingredient for the healer, that was triggered by, originates with or is channeled through *Panaiya*. Allah stands above this relationship but is linked to the ultimate source of healing words, salvation and divine aid. The Holy Spirit is absent by name from this popular cosmology and its presence is only discernable in the use of substances in the healing rituals such as Holy Water. In this sense it appears 'tied' to the material world, a somewhat passive power that emanates without discernment from ritual actions, objects and substances that are in some way 'charged' with divine energy.

## 5.2 Ritual Actions, Implements and Substances: The Role of the Holy Spirit

In many ways it is a much more difficult task to attempt an analysis of the 'actions', and the implements and substances that accompany them in healing rituals, than of the speech or textual element. Although there is less of an air of secrecy surrounding them than there is around the words of *okumak* - in fact not a single *ilaççi* or *okuyucu* objected to me *seeing* what they do - the healers on the whole couldn't explain why they do what they do other

than in terms of tradition or inherited ways of practice. In this light, trying to interpret the ritual actions of healers could very easily become an exercise in ascribing symbolic meanings to actions that may or may not carry a conscious meaning for the culture bearers themselves. Therefore we will not attempt here a full analysis of every aspect of the ritual actions employed by healers. Instead we will stick very closely to an account of the actions, implements and substances employed by Kosti *batyu* and Varvara *bulü*. By focusing in this way on these two healers I hope to demonstrate clearly some of the most important principles involved from our perspective, the focus of which remains that territory where elements that we might identify as relating explicitly to Christianity, divine powers and the Church are harnessed by the *ilaççi*.

Both Kosti *batyu* and Varvara *bulü* begin their healing practices by performing the sign of the cross three times whilst reciting the opening prayer 'In the name of the Father...'. Kosti *batyu* stands before the icon in his room to do this. It is done solemnly whilst standing and precisely according to Orthodox customary practice. This action, together with the short prayer, frame the practice to follow and have the effect of 'sanctifying' and in the words of Kosti *batyu*, making the *ilaççi pak* or spiritually 'clean'. The necessity of repeating three times, not only the sign of the cross, but all ritual actions during healing practices was stressed by my informants, *Her keret lâüzım Bobanın hem Oolun hem Duhun adına* – 'Every time it has to be in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Ghost.'

Kosti *batyu* treats most complaints with simply 'laying on of hands' on the effected area. This is accompanied by recital of his *okumak* and turning the head from time to time to spit (always three times consecutively), an action that is commonly understood to be the actual expulsion from the *ilaççi* of the illness that has been transferred from the patient into the healer. More serious conditions, and especially in order to counter the effects of *büü*, requires a more complex procedure. Water is prepared by 'reading' prayers or *okumak* over it, the whole body of the patient is then washed in the water from head to toe three times and finally three mouthfuls of water must be drunk 'in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Ghost'.

The reliance on sanctified or Holy Water (other *ilaççilər* keep *Ayazma* blessed by the priest for this purpose) of course mirrors the Church's teaching on the qualities of

water prepared in this way. As we can see in the following extract from the text of 'The Blessing of the Waters', this power to cleanse is linked to the action of the Holy Spirit.

O God, our Lord, great in your judgement and marvellous in your acts ..., send the gift of your most holy Spirit, the creator of life, the bestower of every blessing, and bless this water. By the distribution and sprinkling of this water, send us your blessing to wash away the impurity of our passions. We pray you consider our distress, and through your mercy heal the sickness of our souls and bodies.<sup>371</sup>

The connection here between the Holy Water and the healing action of the Holy Spirit is particularly significant. In our earlier discussions on the presence of divine actors in the verbal component of healing practice, we witnessed the ubiquitous presence of *Allah*, Jesus and *Panaiya*. However, the Holy Spirit seems conspicuous by its absence from these texts. In the teachings of Orthodoxy the Holy Spirit is said to reside in the Church and as one Gagauz priest explained: 'The Holy Spirit is everywhere but it is strongest here in the Church.' This may explain why *ilaççilär* frequently employ objects and substances that originate in the Church to supplement their *okumak*. At this point it is useful to recall Varvara *bulü*'s words regarding her chosen healing implements.

And then it came to me in a dream that I should heal people with this piece of chandelier [from the local Church]. There was also a piece of cloth with which I heal. Great things have come from this! And then the children found a horseshoe. I took it to church at Easter and had it blessed, but I hid it in my bag so that no one could see. I also cure people with that. So many people have been cured by me, so many!

This suggests that there is a need for something in addition to the *ilaççi*'s 'gift' and the presence of the divine in the shape of *Panaiya* or Jesus. Varvara *bulü* is able to effectively 'steal' this healing property from the Church, concealing her intention from the priest, implying that the spirit is something that emanates without discernment or consciousness of its own, or at least free of any priestly authority. The close personal connection that the *ilaççi* expresses with the other divine powers is supplemented by the presence of an 'anonymous' spirit that is harnessed using the tools or the mediation of the Church. The

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<sup>371</sup> D. Stanilaoe, 'The Holy Spirit', in *Sobornost* (series 7), 1, 1975, p. 12.

religious institutional 'fact' that is established through the practice of blessing can be deployed, but not instituted, by *Varvara bulü*. The resultant religious institution of healing is one constituted between the Church, and its representatives, and the healers autonomous action.

### 5.3 Reality, Metaphor, Belief: The presence of spiritual beings in ritual healing

In our discussions on the healing system and healing practices of the Gagauz *ilaççılär*, we have discussed some ideas relating to the performative nature of ritual and we have examined instances where analogy, metaphor and imaginal episodes are employed by the *ilaççi* as part of the healing practice. Each of these modes connects the *ilaççi* and the patient with the divine, through persuasion, by expressing the nature of the relationship, and by enstating in the act performance. Precisely how that relationship functions and in what sense the divine or spiritual powers take part in the practices of the *ilaççi* and form part of his or her world are key questions as these will inform our understanding of the sources of the healers' authority and their scope for agency, the basis in religious practice of the institution of healing.

As we have seen from the examples above, it is primarily the Mother of God that takes the role of direct intercessor in human affairs in Gagauz 'epic' charms. In Russian Orthodoxy she often appears as the primary source of divine compassion and in much of the religious folklore and popular literature it is through her eyes that the believer witnesses the life and passion of Christ (see chapter seven, pages 228 and 237-241). The image of the suffering Mother of God, the font of compassion and the source of succour for mankind, is the most striking feature of the popular apocryphal legend 'Dream of the Mother of God'.<sup>372</sup> In Romanian folklore she is frequently seen waiting at heaven's gate ready to 'descend the golden stairway' to intervene and assuage the suffering of mortals.<sup>373</sup>

The immanence of the divine, that is as ubiquitous in the religious folklore of the Gagauz as it is in that of their Romanian neighbours, has been taken up by two of the most celebrated commentators on Romanian folklore and religiosity. As we saw above, the

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<sup>372</sup> Ivanits, *Russian Folk Belief*, p. 21.

<sup>373</sup> In his exhaustive study of Romanian charms Gorovei lists the numerous ways in which *Maica Domnului*, the Mother of God, intervenes to relieve the suffering of the ill and afflicted. See Gorovei, *Descântecetele*, pp. 185-190. See also Ș. Cristescu, *Descântatul în Cornova-Basarabia*, București: Editura Paideia, pp. 263-266.

Romanian poet Lucian Blaga's concept of the role of 'divine compassion' or *intropatie* in the magic of the Romanian *descântator*, relies on just such interventions by divine actors.<sup>374</sup> Eliade too, in his discussions of the 'cosmic Christianity' of the peasants of Eastern Europe, points to the notion of the proximity of the divine and to a non-historical Christ who in folklore continually returns to earth and sanctifies nature and man's environment with his presence.<sup>375</sup>

It is in this role that we most often find *Panaiya* (but on occasion also Jesus) in Gagauz healing practices. There are also numerous religious folk songs that recount her descent to earth to partake in the affairs of mortals.<sup>376</sup> In the *okumak* presented above it is *Panaiya* that hears the tears and cries of distress of the patient and it is she that reassures the patient that they are in good hands and that she is the one that will be able to affect a cure. It is also *Panaiya* that most frequently appears in the visions of the *ilaççilär* and to whom the origins of healing gifts are accredited. The role of *Panaiya* as the direct intercessor and manifestation of compassion stands in contrast to that of the wholly non-corporeal presence of the Holy Spirit, who is much more closely connected with building and material culture of the Church.

These 'imaginal' episodes of the *okumaklar* as well as the 'talk' about visitations by and visions of *Panaiya* on the part of the *ilaççilär*,<sup>377</sup> create the 'substance' of a discourse that carries the power of conviction of the Gagauz healers. The idea that the verbal articulation of something or the establishment of a discourse, in our case around Varvara *bulü*'s visions or Galya's trance-like flights, can result in the creation of a reality that is 'of this world', and not merely a reflection of some alternative realm of existence, has been advanced by linguists and social anthropologists alike. Lindquist, in her study of healing and magic in Russia, makes the case, based on Piercian semiotics and signification, for the ontological 'reality' of gods and spirits in social life. Through the process of interpretation of a 'sign' an 'interpretant' is 'created in the consciousness of the Interpreter, the person whom the Representamen [sign form] addresses'. The signification thereby produces an object of 'knowledge, discourse and social life', which can be fictional

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<sup>374</sup> See note 67.

<sup>375</sup> M. Eliade, *Myth and Reality*, New York: Harper and Row, pp. 172-173.

<sup>376</sup> See especially E. Kvilinkova, *Moldova Gagauzların Halk Türküleri*, Chişinău: Inessa, 2003, p. 27 and pp. 34-36.

<sup>377</sup> Even some of the less celebrated women *okuyucular* accredited the start of their healing careers to a visitation by the Virgin Mary.



creations, imagined powers or spiritual beings that can take on the characteristics of a social person.<sup>378</sup> In a similar vein Raymond Williams argues too that 'language and signification [are] indissoluble elements of the material social process itself.'<sup>379</sup>

As we discussed in the introduction to this thesis, language, and the linguistic resources of religious individuals and groups, is the primary means of bridging the ontological divide and also of establishing all forms of human social institution. Naming things gives them the possibility for social existence; they are 'language-dependent facts'.<sup>380</sup> That is to say, through language the Gagauz healers make assertions about the divine and allow for the divine to 'speak' to us. Thanks to the power or agency of language to 'leave' the body of the speaker it can become the means by which religious institutions, based on divine authority rather than human authority, are constituted and legitimated. The narrative episodes of Gagauz *ilaççilâr*, through the various devices discussed above, become not the words of the healer, but the embodiment and voicing of the divine action and will.

How we, as trained observers, choose to understand the ontological 'reality' of spirits and gods in the worldview of cultures other than our own is a question that has been approached in the study of African religions. It may be useful to cite a couple of examples of how this understanding of the role of discourse and language in the creation of 'alternative' (in relation to that of the Western trained researcher) social realities can help resolve issues that seem unsolvable when viewed through the lens of some earlier interpretive anthropological methods.

Harry West critiques the approach that has been taken by some anthropologists who, in their search to make sense of belief systems in which spiritual beings and expressions of their 'reality' are pervasive, describe such phenomena as metaphors for some other aspect of more 'tangible' social reality of which they seek to make sense. Such approaches, which view religion as primarily a symbolic and metaphoric representation of social reality, have been termed 'symbolist' and have their origin in the work of Émile Durkheim.<sup>381</sup> West's own tentative suggestion before an audience of local Mozambican

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<sup>378</sup> Lindquist, *Conjuring Hope*, p. 13.

<sup>379</sup> H. West, *Ethnographic Sorcery*, Chicago and London: Chicago University Press, 2007, p. 59.

<sup>380</sup> Searle, *The Construction*, pp. 60-63.

<sup>381</sup> See B. Morris, *Anthropological Studies of Religion*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987, pp. 119-120, J. Skorupski, *Symbol and Theory: A philosophical study of theories of religion in social anthropology*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976, pp. 18-21, and West, *Ethnographic*, p. 45.

Muedans (the subjects of his fieldwork) that their belief in 'sorcery lions' was just such a case of belief operating as metaphor was greeted with the protest 'metaphors don't kill the neighbours, lion people do!' <sup>382</sup> West's experience here echoes the warning given by Luise White, that West himself cites, that metaphor used in this way may be interpreted by the belief holders as a 'polite academic term for false'. <sup>383</sup> Kwame Appiah, commenting on African religious ritual points out that 'treating an element of a ritual as symbolic requires that there is someone that treats it symbolically'. <sup>384</sup> The symbol or metaphor, and the meaning that is attached to it, is therefore always 'somebody's' symbol or metaphor and it may very well be that it is not that of the person or people with whom a belief or ritual originates but that of the anthropologist or researcher. <sup>385</sup>

Appiah goes on to argue, in opposition to Geertz's assertion that 'religion is a system of symbols', that in fact the symbolism of religions arises out of the 'Fundamental nature of religious beliefs, and that these fundamental beliefs are not themselves symbolic'. The 'fundamental' aspect of religious belief and ritual Appiah asserts is the 'ontology of invisible beings'. <sup>386</sup> In our case this implies that in order for the *ilaççi* to invoke and invite *Panaiya* to partake in the healing process she must firstly 'exist' and secondly be able to manifest in such a way as to be able to benefit the patient. The place of metaphor and symbol in such activity is thus a secondary one that builds on the 'reality' of the first. To illustrate further, using an example very close to Appiah's own, when Gagauz pour wine or beer onto the grave of deceased relatives it may be a symbolic act: there is no assumption that the dead will actually drink the wine. But just as in Appiah's illustration, the deceased, who are 'symbolically acknowledged', must exist for the offering to make sense. The Gagauz frequently offer alcohol, food and gifts to the deceased in both formal and informal situations and they are understood at such times to be 'present' and aware of the gifts and offerings that have been made to them. <sup>387</sup>

If we accept that symbols and metaphors arise from beliefs (and not vice versa), then the power, saliency and 'survival value' of the beliefs cannot be sought primarily in

<sup>382</sup> West, *Ethnographic*, pp. 19-25.

<sup>383</sup> Luise White quoted in West, *Ethnographic*, p. 35.

<sup>384</sup> K. Appiah, *In My Father's House: Africa in the Philosophy of Culture*, New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992, p. 111.

<sup>385</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 111 and West, *Ethnographic*, pp. 35-38.

<sup>386</sup> Appiah, *In My Father's House*, p. 112.

<sup>387</sup> This is done most explicitly at the feast of *Küçük Paskellä* or Little Easter (see footnote 173 on page 80).

the symbols and metaphors they give birth to. As Skorupski points out, the symbolist agenda 'has little to do with searching for the causes which produced the overt, surface form of ritual beliefs'.<sup>388</sup> Beliefs that lie behind religious ritual have been approached in many varied ways, as 'pseudoscientific explanations, rationalisations of customary behaviour, personal or communal ideologies, or highly structured doctrinal formulations' and also as 'mental states of individuals'.<sup>389</sup> As beliefs are demonstrably 'social', in the sense that they are expressed collectively in communal practice, discourse and ritual, whilst at the same time being 'personal' and individual, that is they are processed, 'held' and validated in the internal world of the believer, they may be considered to incorporate all or some of the above. Moreover, being both at once 'social' and 'individual' beliefs must in some way depend on the will, ability and authority of individuals to transmit, shape and fortify them in the religious community. This is the process of transmission from the internal world is shaped by the motivations and convictions of the individual each time they 'deploy' their agency by discussing, acting and influencing others in line with what they hold to be 'true'. Galya, *Kosti batyu*, *Vavara bulü* and all the other healers I met are in this sense 'making' both 'reality' and the beliefs that support that reality. Approaching the world of Gagauz healers in this way allows us to hold a picture of 'their' religious worldview based on the validity of their words, actions and experience. This is not achieved through empathetic perception but by acknowledging the power and agency of the individual, through language, to establish religious facts and the primacy of practice or performance when interpreting data. It is important to take an awareness of this into our discussion of the role of the Orthodox Church in the healing system and how its attitudes and intentions are expressed towards village healers.

Our discussion so far has centred almost exclusively on the world of the *ilaççi*, their practices and place in the traditional healing system. This has revealed some important issues regarding Gagauz healing practices that are worth summarising before we go on to look more closely at the part played by the Church. Firstly, the simple distinction between 'despicable "magic"' and 'honourable "religion"'<sup>390</sup> that was inherited from earlier discourses, and which in many ways has been perpetuated by Eastern European commentators, does not do justice to the complexities of a system that encompasses a

<sup>388</sup> Skorupski, *Symbol*, p. 18.

<sup>389</sup> C. Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Action*, New York and Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1992, pp. 182-183.

<sup>390</sup> Lang, *Sacred Games*, p. 109.

spectrum of practices and beliefs that have their institutional base in Church Christianity and lay-moderated community religious practice. Secondly, the healers' connections with the divine and spiritual world cannot be reduced to simple categorisations such as 'coercion' and 'supplication', but are articulated by the *ilaççi* in many varied ways including visionary and dream sequences that bestow authority, 'imaginal' journeys with the divine, analogical myths as well as classical 'magical' formulas. These various 'objects of discourse' and 'modes' of practice characterise and give form to the *ilaççi*'s relations with the divine and spiritual agents. Finally, we looked briefly at one way of understanding how, as outside observers, we can reflect on the 'reality' of the presence of divine agents in the worldview of the Gagauz. By allowing the words and actions of the *ilaççi* to speak at 'face value' and by giving them such validity as social facts that both reflect and create interior worlds as well as social religious realities, we can at least avoid some of the grossest pitfalls of 'interpretative ascendancy'.<sup>391</sup>

#### 5.4 The Orthodox Church on Healing and Magic

The Orthodox Church has a rich scriptural and historical inheritance of healing and exorcism that has come down to it through scripture, liturgical tradition and in the form of the cult of icons and saints. In the Russian Church, as in other forms of Orthodox Christianity, the close association with the healing mission of Christ and the miraculous healings connected with the cult of saints and icons remained at the core of Orthodox mystical theology, the foundation of which very much rests on the mystical experience of the Holy Spirit operating through the Church. Unlike in the West where, due to the influence of medieval scholastic theology and sixteenth century Reformation rationality, healing became tainted by accusations of the 'manipulation of spiritual forces', the Orthodox Church in Russia has consistently recognised the healing power of relics and especially that of icons. The Church in the East never underwent the kind of reforms that would result in a popular or far-reaching re-evaluation of 'the miraculous' in the life of the Christian community.<sup>392</sup> Rather, the Russian Orthodox Church, especially since the 19<sup>th</sup> century, sought to impose and maintain its authority more closely over the miraculous,

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<sup>391</sup> West, *Ethnographic Sorcery*, p. 80.

<sup>392</sup> Porterfield, *Healing*, p. 22.

especially when attributed to the relics of saints, holy men and icons, as these formed one of the constantly renewing, vital wellsprings of popular Orthodox devotion.<sup>393</sup> The Christ of Orthodoxy remained very much 'healer' and helper of the suffering as well as teacher of his flock, the Virgin Mary, through her miraculous icons and numerous appearances in visions, the source of succour and consolation for the suffering, and the Holy Spirit radiating from the Church the medium through which both body and soul could be cured.

My discussions with village clergy in *Gagauziya* on the role of the Church in healing reflected the general attitude outlined above. Emphasis is placed very much placed on communal prayer for the sick and can be summed up by the advice of Saint Ambrose below.

Anyone who is sick should seek the prayers of others, that they may be restored to health; that through the intercession of others the enfeebled form of the body and the wavering footsteps of our deeds may be restored to health... Learn, you who are sick to gain strength through prayer. Seek the prayer of others, call upon the Church to pray for you, and God, in his regard for the Church, will give what He might refuse to you.<sup>394</sup>

And in this sense the Service of the Holy Unction, which encompasses confession, anointing with oil and communion, is considered the most efficacious and ultimate intercession that the Church can make on the behalf of the sick. This rite combines the healing power of the Holy Spirit that has its precedent in Jesus commissioning his disciples to anoint with oil when they healed the sick (Mark 6:13) and that of penance and absolution, the role of which in healing has been connected to Jesus' healing of the paralytic (Mark 2:1-12) where forgiveness of sins is clearly linked to healing.<sup>395</sup>

The strength of belief in the miraculous power of icons by both the Church and the laity was demonstrated in the early 1990s in the Gagauz village of *Tomay* (Tomai) where a copy of the famous Kazan Mother of God icon was seen to be weeping. Thousands of pilgrims flocked to the local church to file past and kiss the icon, many in the hope of being cured of their illnesses.

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<sup>393</sup> See in this regard Shevzov, *Russian Orthodoxy*, pp. 171-213.

<sup>394</sup> St. Ambrose, *On the Healing of the Paralytic* quoted in, *The Teaching of the Holy Fathers on Illness*, Etna California: The Nikodemus Orthodox Publication Society, p. 30.

<sup>395</sup> F. Senn, *Christian Liturgy*, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997, pp. 670-671.

According to the Church, these and officially sanctioned relics and prayers to saints are examples of the legitimate ways in which the Church taps the healing potential of the Holy and intervenes on the behalf of the sick. All practices that fall outside these, including those practised in some monasteries and by 'rogue' priests, receive official condemnation and scorn from the priesthood.

In her study on the Church and magic in urban Russia, Lindquist speaks of the 'ideological offensive against magic deployed by the Russian Orthodox Church in the post-Communist Russia'. Referring to magic and healing in Moscow in the 1990s, she describes an emergence and revival of practices, which became 'popular, pervasive and extremely public'.<sup>396</sup> In response to this the Russian Church has attempted to educate believers through the publication of literature that vilifies and condemns the practitioners of magic and healing and portrays them as followers of Satan, 'tempting serpents who draw gullible people directly into the eternal flames of Hell'.<sup>397</sup>

The Romanian Church too (which together with the Russian Church is the source of much of the religious literature available in Moldova) is engaged in publishing material to counter what it deems to be the activity of the Devil. Church publications, which draw on teachings of the Fathers of the Early Church on such matters, describe all forms of magic from fortune-telling and astrology to healing with charms and amulets to be works of the devil. One of Romania's most revered monks, Father Cleopa, in one of his works, addresses directly the kind of practices that are used by the Gagauz *ilaççilâr*. The extract below remarks on the kind of closing formulas used by Romanain *descîntator* and Gagauz *ilaççi* alike.

And you only see that the old woman makes the sign of the cross in the charm and hear that she says Our Father and then incants the charm. But after that she says: 'the charm is from me, the cure is from the Mother of God!' Do you hear what the servant of the Devil says? Do you hear how Satan mixes poison with honey in order to carry you to the depths of hell? But what connection does the Mother of God have with the charms of old women? The Church condemns the users of charms.<sup>398</sup>

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<sup>396</sup> G. Lindquist, 'Not my will but thine be done: church versus magic in contemporary Russia', *Culture and Religion*, 1 (2), 2000, pp. 247-249.

<sup>397</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 251.

<sup>398</sup> From *The Words of Father Cleopa On Witchcraft and Fortune-Telling* in *Despre Vrăji și Blesteme*, Teleorman: Editura Anestis, undated [purchased in 2007].

Whilst condemning the activities of the users of traditional charms and magic, the Church also acknowledges and recognises the power of such practices by offering ways of countering the effects of magic. Many prayer books offer explicit advice on what one should do if one falls foul of a magician or if one is afflicted with the evil eye.<sup>399</sup> This may have the side effect of reinforcing people's belief in the power of such practices and their practitioners.

The contrast between the urban environment of Moscow described by Lindquist, which is at the heart of the Russian Church and State, and rural Moldova, on the periphery of both the Church and the post-Soviet cultural space, could not be sharper. In relation to magic and healing quite different processes are in operation in these two distant cultural spaces. Rural *Gagauziya* has not seen the emergence of new eclectic forms of healing and magic that Lindquist speaks of and nor can we speak of a 'revival' of traditional practices, at least not in the sense of a 'conscious' revival. But this is not to say that in Moldova the clergy do not express equally ambivalent views towards the activities of village healers. Priests can often be heard speaking out against such practices in their Sunday sermons and in private conversations a couple of priests gave some quite graphic accounts of 'barbarous' rituals involving blood-letting and the drinking of blood as examples of how perverted and evil such practices are. However, regarding the persistence of such practices one local priest described the situation in the following terms:

Under the communists the people had no one to guide them spiritually. Old women were left to their own devices and practised all sorts of strange things that they thought was Orthodoxy. Now that the Church is back they are reluctant to give them up; they got used to doing things their own way and now they won't listen to us.<sup>400</sup>

This particular priest was in no doubt at all that these practices should be stopped by whatever means possible: 'We are really trying to put a stop to this. I don't allow women into the church that I know have been practising this stuff.' However, this kind of explicitly stated sanction can be contrasted with the experience of the *ilaççilär* and

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<sup>399</sup> The Romanian Church publishes many booklets with advice and prayers against magic and the evil eye. These are available for sale on most Church bookstalls.

<sup>400</sup> From interview with village priest, 15<sup>th</sup> May 2007.

*okuyucular* we met earlier. We know from the accounts of healers such a Kosti *batyu* that the proclamations and sanctions of the local priest are not always as definitive as they may seem. The healers I spoke to in *Kazayak*, Kosti *batyu*'s home village, were adamant that the priest knew of their activities and although not explicitly condoning them believes they 'do nothing wrong as long as they use the *Oçe naş*, the Our Father, and nothing else'. There is also plenty of evidence that some priests, when beyond the enquiring gaze of the outsiders, believe in and even encourage healers. Varvara *bulü*'s account of the healing of a nun and the subsequent visit by a local priest may be one such instance. The priesthood in *Gagauziya*, as we have already discussed, come from the same local cultural background as the faithful and do not form a distinct 'class apart'.

It is important to reflect also that many healers are intimately connected with the Church as an institution. They are amongst the 'culture bearers' that helped bridge the Soviet years when any kind of spiritual or religious knowledge was highly prized and a closely guarded treasure. They are also amongst those that were most active in the reopening of the churches following the collapse of the Soviet system and continue to work as church wardens, cleaners and choristers. There is also some irony in the fact, and this is something that Lindquist picks up in relation to healers in Moscow too, that the healers actually encourage participation in the Church, are often exemplary *klisecilär*, and increase the legitimacy of following a spiritual life.<sup>401</sup>

### 5.5 The Role of the Monasteries

In addition to the attitudes expressed by individual local priests and those of the central Church authorities, there is the third factor in the Church's relationship to healing that impacts on the traditional practices of the *ilaççi* and must also be taken into consideration. In the years following the end of communism, gradually monasteries have begun to regain their old role in the spiritual lives of believers, but this is not something about which parish clergy are always entirely happy.

During the Soviet period the convent of the Holy Nativity of the Mother of God near the Gagauz villages of *Dmitrovka* and *Alexandrovka*, in the nearby Odessa region of Ukraine, played an important role in the lives of Gagauz believers as a place of pilgrimage.

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<sup>401</sup> Lindquist, 'Not My Will', p. 259.



Some informants suggested that this monastery in particular was the source of *epistoliya* literature of the *tetradkas*. Since the imposition of stricter travel restrictions between the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine, and because of the ensuing controversy over ID cards and passports that incorporate the number 666 in the barcodes (see page 109), Gagauz believers have begun to travel to other parts of Moldova on pilgrimage in preference to the traditional destinations in Odessa and Kiev. As well as the recently reopened monastery at *Küçük Baurçi* (*Baurçu*, *Căușeni* district), which attracts Gagauz pilgrims due to its proximity to a small remote Gagauz village, its rail link with *Gagauziya*, and its two or three Gagauz speaking monks with their preference for the Church Slavonic liturgy, Gagauz pilgrims now visit many other Moldovan monasteries (both within the Republic and across the nominal border in the break-away region of Transnistria).<sup>402</sup>

The monasteries of the region, as well as being the centres of ascetic piety, the home of revered spiritual fathers of the hesychast tradition<sup>403</sup> and the home of miraculous icons and relics, are also traditionally the place where one might seek out an exorcist. Exorcism continues to be widely practised by Orthodox Clergy, particularly monastics, and is an especially visible phenomenon in Romania and Moldova.<sup>404</sup> The 'gift' of exorcism is one of the marks of spiritual achievement of ascetics, and many of the exalted monk-hierarchs of the Church, until even recent years, were celebrated for their ability to exorcise demons.<sup>405</sup> Mass healings and exorcisms are performed regularly in at least a couple of locations in Moldova and two sites in particular have become regular places of pilgrimage for Gagauz believers seeking cures from illness.

Villagers from Avdarma often visit the new monastery at Cociulia where they attend mass on a Thursday evening through to Friday morning.

<sup>402</sup> I spoke on several occasions to Gagauz believers that had begun to visit the medieval monasteries of central Moldova such as Noul Neamț and Cipriana, as well as the newly opened Moldovan monastery at Cociulia close to the Gagauz administrative centre Komrat.

<sup>403</sup> The Orthodox mystical tradition associated with the recitation of the 'Jesus Prayer'. This tradition probably originated on Mount Athos and underwent a revival in Russia, Romania and Ukraine in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Some monasteries in Romanian Moldavia are still renowned for their tradition of practising this form of Orthodox mystical asceticism.

<sup>404</sup> One high profile case in Romanian Moldavia reached the attention of the international media in 2005 when a nun suffering from schizophrenia was killed during the course of an exorcism in her convent conducted by the local priest. See "*Crucified nun dies in 'exorcism'*," BBC News, June 18<sup>th</sup> 2005, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/europe/4107524.stm> [accessed 10 July 2007]

<sup>405</sup> See I. Bălan, *A Moldvai Szerzetesek Élete*, Budapest: Odigitria-Osiris, 2002.

This is the kind of mass that our local priest only does once a year; it is especially for the sick. At the monastery they do it every week! Why our local priest doesn't do it more often I don't know. The people want him to do it but he won't, and he doesn't like us going to the monastery either. Maybe he doesn't have the same spiritual power as the monks do; maybe he is envious of them. It can't be anything bad because it is done in the monastery.<sup>406</sup>

The implication seemed to be that people resented him for not fulfilling their wishes in this regard. When I pressed her on exactly what kind of healing practices they do at the monastery she explained in the following terms.

It is like an ordinary mass but at the end we are anointed with oil and blessed with holy water. Afterwards the older monk invites people up to the altar, only those that want to go up, those who want to be healed. He takes a knife and does some movements over their head. Like a *babu* might do. Yes, just like you see old women doing. Sometimes people go into hysterics when he does this. I saw a woman start to scream and convulse until the monk threw holy water on her. Then she quietened down.

Gagauz clergy frown upon their Moldovan and Romanian counterparts for this kind of unorthodox activity and hope to discourage their parishioners from visiting the monasteries renowned for this kind of practice and from taking part in such exorcisms. Attitudes towards monks on the part of married parish clergy are often negative, many priests believing that monks have an 'easy life' and that the real work of God is conducted in the parish. Orthodox monasteries are generally renowned for their arch-conservatism, as we commented earlier, but this is not always reflected in adherence to strictly orthodox practice. Established tradition based on the insights and experience of the local *stareți*, whether in line with Church teaching or not, is often the measure against which to judge practice rather than official doctrine.

We can see from the above that the Church's attitudes and actions with regard to healing are far from uniform especially when viewed from outside. The Church does not present a fully coherent message or speak with a single voice in regard either to its own role as an agent of healing or that of the village *ilaççi*. The activities and attitudes of the priesthood and monastic community seem at times quite ambiguous and it is easy to

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<sup>406</sup> Extract from interview with woman from Avdarma, 19.05.07.

envisage how believers and healers may interpret them in varying ways. Traditional views of the spiritual power attained through asceticism and celibacy reinforce the influence of the monastics in relation to healing and exorcism particularly. There does seem to be some mileage also in the commonly expressed views regarding the married clergy's closeness socially and culturally to their flock, which traditionally is seen to undermine their authority and compromises claims to spiritual authority. The attitude of the central Church authorities, which despite being quite explicit with regard to the practices of healers, is rarely heard due to problems of language and availability of Church literature, something at the heart of our discussions in chapter one. Within the Orthodox Church therefore diverse sources of authority exist in regard to the practice of healing and their voices are heard at varying times and with varying degrees of receptivity by Gagauz healers.

## 5.6 Gagauz healing texts from the *tetradkas*

Earlier, this chapter traced the primary elements of 'epic' charms used by the *ilaççi* and the *okuyucu*. The examples drawn on come from the oral repertoire of village healers. However, in addition to these epic *okumak* we find other legendary texts in circulation in Gagauz villages that fulfil a similar function. Such texts often appear to originate in the grey area between what is considered folklore proper and the official church benediction and exorcism texts. We recalled earlier that the monasteries especially played a role in the composition and dissemination of such texts, and also continue to practise exorcism with some unorthodox features, and from there they found their way into the popular religious practice of believers.<sup>407</sup> A brief look at these texts will help us further elaborate on the context of the relationship between Church and lay healers in the constitution of religious institutions.

Amongst the Gagauz these texts appear in *tetradkas* alongside the *epistoliyas*, *akafisty* hymns, religious folksongs, folk prayers and apocalypses that occupy a similar ambiguous territory between the accepted canon and the rejected apocrypha. Because of its use in healing we can also include in this category the apocryphal legend 'The Dream of

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<sup>407</sup> See in this respect Pócs, 'Én vagyok mindennél', pp. 174-175.

the Mother of God' or *Panaiyan Düşü*.<sup>408</sup> Some of these texts mirror so closely the structure of the epic charms outlined above that it is worth presenting a couple of examples in their entirety. The following example, which was found in a couple of *tetradkas* from the village of *Tomay* discussed in the previous chapter,<sup>409</sup> shows clearly the structural similarities with the epic *okumak*: beginning with the journey, followed by the meeting with evil forces, overpowering evil forces by means of identification and naming, and finally the closing banishment and ratification formulas.<sup>410</sup>

Holy, Holy, Holy Lord *Sa-va-of*. I, the Archangel Michael, Soldier of Heaven, coming down from Mount *Eleon* came face to face with *Avizuhii* the Wing of Satan. He was very ugly, the hair of his head came down to his heel, his hands were of iron, his eyes were like stars, and Archangel Michael asked: 'Where are you coming from you unclean spirit? And where are you going? And what is your name? But he replied: 'I am *Avezuha*, the Wing of Satan, and I am going to Bethlehem of the Jews because I heard that Jesus Christ would be born from a virgin, from Mary, and I am going there to deceive him.' Then Archangel Michael took him by the hair and placed him in iron chains, and beat him in order that he tell him all his tricks, and again he said: 'I will become a greyhound and frog and crow and pigeon and insect and spider and ugly lightning and I will go like this to the house of men and I will deceive men, and I will make the women ill and I will kill all the children and animals, and I have 19 names:

- |              |              |             |             |
|--------------|--------------|-------------|-------------|
| 1. Vestnitsa | 5. Linikojda | 9. Lepiha   | 15. Huba    |
| 2. Navadoria | 6. Avizuha   | 10. Gripa   | 16. Gioana  |
| 3. Solnomia  | 7. Miha      | 11. Slada   | 17. Glubina |
| 4. Silina    | 8. Skarmila  | 12. Nakvuza | 18. Isprava |
|              |              | 13. Ataua   | 19. Tihona  |
|              |              | 14. Hubisa  |             |

<sup>408</sup> An English translation of *Panaiyan Düşü* appears on pages 237-239. The original Gagauz language variant of this text appears as text 3 in Appendix 4.

<sup>409</sup> This is one of two *betva* 'exorcism' (or literally 'curse') texts found in the *tetradkas* in the village of *Tomay*. The text presented here appears to be synthesis of elements from both church text and folk healing repertoires. Regarding the genesis of such texts, which is often placed in the Middle Ages, it seems not to be the result of simply one tradition having influenced the other, but rather a question of the development and cross-fertilization of the two traditions side by side for several centuries.

<sup>410</sup> For further discussion of the structure of charms and exorcisms texts see also J. Kapaló, 'Molitva i zaklinaniya v religioznom folkloru gagauzov, in *Istoria i Kultura Gagauzov*, Komrat-Kishinev: Pontus, 2006, pp. 477-486 and J. Kapaló, 'İsus Hristos yapmış bir büyük pınar ...' – Epic Healing Charms amongst the Gagauz of Moldova', in G. Grigorov (ed.), *Bulgari i Gagauzi Zaedno Prez Godinite*, Velico Târnovo: Faber, 2007, pp. 67-73.

And wherever these names are written, and [*güüdäm benim yapılı*] I will not go near that house to a distance of seventy leagues. Then Archangel Michael said to him: 'I say, declare and cry out in the name of our Lord *Allah* Jesus Christ by [the will of] *Allah* you will not have the strength to come near to the houses of the servants of *Allah*, nor their barns, nor their animals, nor their buckets that are given to them by *Allah*. *Allah* says: 'Go to desolate mountains, where man does not live and cock does not crow, to arid rocks, there be your place for eternity, and again I swear in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ and with his pure mother Mary and with John the Baptist and the twelve apostles and Basil the Great, Gregory *Bogoslov* and John Crysostom, with Mathew, Luke, Mark and the four evangelists, and the 318 fathers from [...], and with the great Saint-Martyr George, and Saint Dimitrie and heirarch Nicholas, Theodor *Stratilat*, and John of *Sugava*, and with all of the saints, and with all of the good, and the martyrs and with all of the saints for ever and ever. Amen.<sup>411</sup>

This text, which shows the Archangel Michael over-powering a female 'child-stealing' demon, demonstrates a high degree of synthesis between Church benediction and exorcism texts and 'epic' *okumak* of the *ilaççı*. This is most notable in the opening lines, in the invocation of God and the stationing of Archangel Michael as the main protagonist, and in the closing ratification, which elicits the power of a whole host of saints and Church fathers.

The final example is of a semi-official Church malediction text, which was found in the same *tetradka* as the previous text. Here again we see the Archangel Michael invoked in his role as the main weapon in God's arsenal against Satan. The central section demonstrates, by analogy, God's power to overcome his enemies. The text then ends with the standard banishment formula described earlier.

Curses of the Archangel Michael over Satan, against paralysis and tuberculosis. I curse you the source of all evil and wickedness. I curse you that rejected heavenly light and was abandoned to the depths of darkness, to be raised. I curse you unclean spirit, by *Allah* by Sa-va-of, and with the whole host and power of the angels of *Allah*, depart far from God's servants. I curse you by *Allah*, who with his word created everything, and by our Lord Jesus Christ his only son. By his son who since before time was spoken and born

<sup>411</sup> Text 9 of Appendix 2 is an extract of one of the original Gagauz variants of this exorcism text. Pócs discusses the origins of a Romanian version of this exorcism at some length in her article on charms to protect pregnant women and women in childbirth. See Pócs, 'Lilith', p. 218-221.

without sin from the very holy and unseen light, who made man in his own image, which from before the law and before every light the angels with his guidance saved, that sin from heaven with water drowned. From under the heavens he separated the depths, and the wars that made uncleanness on the earth, and the domes of filth he crushed and Sodom and Gomorrah where they stood with fire and sulphur he burned, the smoke of which smokes without end, who with his staff parted the sea and his people passed and the tyrant pharaoh and his soldiers which by God were carried with waves to be eternally drowned. I curse you by him who was baptised in the river Jordan and who gave us an example without end. I curse you by him that returned to the wind and who calmed the sea. I curse you by *Allah* and the power of his power of his word. From *Allah* was blown the withered soul of man.

Fear! Flee far, dirty and unclean devil from under the depths, faceless deceiver, with shame on this body that was created and made beautiful by the hand of *Allah* in the likeness of *Allah* that was made flesh, and disappear and don't turn back, hide together with other evil and unclean spirits, and go to waterless and desolate places, where man does not live, [.....] father of lies. Amen.

The last two texts are presented at this point in order to illustrate that the 'epic' folk charms exist as part of a spectrum of verbal and textual responses to illness and spirit or demon possession that spans from the simple folk formula through to the officially sanctioned text. The formal and structural similarities between these categories of text are apparent even to the casual observer. Any attempt to distinguish between practices on the basis of form, structure or mode of operation in order to achieve a rationale for classifying practices as 'religious' or 'magical' are, in the case of Gagauz healing practices, a futile exercise.<sup>412</sup> And in any case, conclusions in this field may not actually tell us much about *how* the religious community functions as a body that includes diverse actors: village priest, parishioners, healers, monastics, translators of *epistolijas* and not least the divine and spiritual agents.

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<sup>412</sup> Discussions on the origins of exorcism texts and charms often show them to be inextricably linked. See Pócs, 'Én vagyok mindennél'.

## 5.7 Agency and the Diverse Sources of Religious Authority

The *ilaççilär*, patients and believers with whom I discussed healing, had a clear understanding of what, from their perspective, are the legitimate, efficacious and necessary practices of the village healer. Unlike myself, who had willingly submitted to various forms of treatment out of curiosity and the desire for academic data, my informants clearly relied on the treatments of the *ilaççi* to bring them relief from certain ailments. I had no reason to doubt the strength of belief in the *okumak* of the *ilaççi* and this was also reflected in the strength of the *ilaççi*'s belief in the certainty, necessity and power of the intervention of divine agents in order that there should be *imdat* or a release from suffering.

The 'knowledge' and experience of the divine in healing practices is reflected in the expressions of the 'proximity' of the divine in everyday life. This 'near' experience of the divine is not challenged by the Church; the Church has merely sought to regulate and control its various expressions in the religious life of believers by officially recognising the miraculous power of some icons or relics, or visions of the Mother of God. The failure on the part of lay believers to understand the Church's views and pronouncements on issues relating to the validity of religious experiences is understandable if we accept the 'reality' of such experiences on the part of believers. The Church, on the other hand, in taking on the role of arbiter, doubting and sometimes denying the credibility of the visions and 'gifts' of the *ilaççi*, places itself, in the eyes of believers, in a suspect position. Healers and their patients 'know' the truth of their experience of the divine and what is more can find validation of this themselves amongst some monastics, priest-exorcists or in the texts they consider authoritative. These are religious facts that are established and institutionalised in the same way and via the same means as 'official' Church doctrines and pronouncements.

As we saw so clearly in the previous chapters, the upheavals of the past 100 years have placed the Orthodox Church in a constant state of flux, her authority undermined by the state and the ethnic and national policies of Moldovan Church itself. The message of the Church in regards to many aspects of Orthodox faith and practice has been weakened and at certain stages almost totally silenced. During these periods the leadership of communal religious life passed to those who Kononenko terms the 'culture bearers', who in some sense are 'religious specialists' - amongst whom we find the peasant translators we met earlier and the *ilaççilär* - many of whom were most active in the revival of the Church

in the 1990s. Others operate and practise on its fringes.<sup>413</sup> The deep feelings of cultural disjuncture or dislocation - the belief that knowledge of things past is rare, is quickly degenerating and is in danger of being totally lost with the passing of the generations - that is expressed by many of the older generation, bolsters the authority of the culture bearers. The revival of the Church in the post-Soviet era has created a new set of tensions between these culture-bearers and the Orthodox clergy. Similarly to the translators of the *epistoliyas*, the *ilaççilär* operate in a 'contested' sphere where issues of legitimacy and authority are negotiated in relation to the Church, its practices and priesthood. The *ilaççilär* I met each referenced in their practices the Church, priests and monastics as a means of strengthening their claims to legitimacy, and as we also saw many of the practices betray a long history of interaction and common borrowings across the two spheres. Such is the Orthodox Church's diverse message that healers can find within the Church, whether that be from a monk or nun, from priests who themselves conduct healings or exorcisms, texts which challenge the authority of the priest, or simply in the power of Church substances and objects that can be appropriated, validation for their activities.

The power to institute, and therefore also to constitute, religious facts is dependent on the 'texts' of practices, irrespective of their origin, the power of language to be a 'vehicle' of divine agency, and the agency of the actors listed above. Religious institutions, in this case the healing system, are constituted between the heavily regulated institutional systems of the Church and the institutionalising 'performance' activities of lay practitioners; religious facts generated between and amongst these actors are 'common goods' that traverse categorical distinctions.

In addition to the above practices that harness or tap the divine sources of authority through their use of language, both 'text' and speech act, most healers of high standing have a religious 'narrative' and 'tale of calling' that acts as a further 'divine' sanction for their activities. These narratives form a discourse in the community and are also reflected and elaborated in the practices of the healers. They are sometimes used as justification for defying the will of the local priest and the presence of divine agents in the healing practices as evidence of divine sanction to practise. In this sense the *ilaççi* relies on the ontology of

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<sup>413</sup> N. Kononenko, 'Folk Orthodoxy: Popular Religion in Contemporary Ukraine', in J. Himka and A. Zayarnyuk (eds.), *Letters from Heaven: Popular Religion in Russia and Ukraine*, Toronto, Buffalo and London: University of Toronto Press, 2006, p. 47.



divine and spiritual beings to acquire the legitimacy to practise and challenge the authority of the Church. The acceptance of this 'reality' by the local community is demonstrated in the careers and authority of the three *ilaççilär* whose biographies and practices form the core of this study: Galya, Kosti *batyu* and Vavara *bulü*. The 'social reality' of spiritual powers that is articulated and performed in the healing practices and is elaborated in the discourse of the *ilaççi* is the key sources of authority of the *ilaççi* and determine her or his scope for 'religious agency' in the face of Church opposition.

As with the use of *epistoliyas* we saw in the previous chapter, the exercising of agency in the religious sphere is often activated by or is a response on the part of believers to the practical existential trials of life. Linquist in her study of healing and magic in Russia links the growth in agency in the sphere of magic with the sense of unpredictable or unstable life circumstances.

Magic practices thrive where power is brutal and overwhelming, where the rational channels of agency are insufficient or of limited value, and where the uncertainty of life calls for methods of existential reassurance and control that rational and technical means cannot offer.<sup>414</sup>

In Moldova, as in the rest of the former Soviet Union, severe economic depression and political instability, altered, reduced or totally eliminated the opportunity for agency in many spheres that had been familiar and safe. In rural *Gagauziya* the agency displayed on the part of traditional healers represents an example of believers 'claiming' and maintaining agency in a sphere that in the Soviet period was encroached upon by modern bio-medicine and in the post-Soviet years is gradually coming under the scrutiny of the Orthodox Church. Village healers maintain and foster the 'organic' connection that historically has existed between themselves and their practices and the Orthodox Church. However, they do not operate in harmony. To use an expression coined by Jim Kiernan in relation to Zulu healing practices, there exists a 'contiguity of differences' between the sphere of the Church and that of the healers.<sup>415</sup> Gagauz healers are not able to achieve an explicit reconciliation of the two spheres of operation but they are able to elicit spiritual

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<sup>414</sup> Lindquist, *Conjuring Hope*, p. 2.

<sup>415</sup> J. Kiernan, 'Variations on a Christian theme: The healing synthesis of Zulu Zionism', in Stewart, C., Shaw, R., (eds.) *Syncretism/Anti-Syncretism: The Politics of Religious Synthesis*, London and New York: Routledge, 1994, p. 76.

power via their own agency through healing words, visions, prophecies, and appropriation of 'holy' substances and artefacts. The religious facts upon which their practices, the 'institution' of religious healing, are based, are 'common goods' which constitute the social religious reality of the two spheres traditionally labelled 'folk' and 'official'.

The constraining and the enabling aspects of religious agency amongst Gagauz healers are many and diverse, as they would certainly also prove to be if we were to examine these factors in regard to clerical agency. That seemingly incompatible or contradictory attitudes and practices arise does not indicate that we are dealing with 'two' distinct forms of religiosity, an official one and a 'folk religion'. The Orthodox Christianity of the Gagauz is the product of varied expressions of individual and corporate agency, the basis of which lie in diverse sources of religious authority accessed through the 'language' of practices and voiced by religious actors. Authority itself arises from many varied and discernible sources of which the Church is only one. The authority of the Church is expressed in its doctrine and as Appiah justly points out the history of the Christian Church is for the most part a history of doctrines, but doctrine is not analogous with belief; it is 'rather the verbal formulae that express belief'.<sup>416</sup> The authority that arises from 'belief' itself, founded on individual religious experience, must be articulated in practice, and it is here in language that we find the source of the *ilaççi's* autonomy and scope for agency in the religious sphere.

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<sup>416</sup> Appiah, *In My Father's House*, p. 112.

## Chapter 6.

### Allah versin! – ‘May God grant it!’: Prayer as Social and Cosmological Performance

The French sociologist Marcel Mauss in his introduction to his doctoral thesis on prayer described the many guises and forms that prayer may take.

Infinitely supple, it has taken the most varied forms, by turns adoring and coercive, humble and threatening, dry and full of imagery, immutable and variable, mechanical and mental. It has filled the most varied roles: here it is a brusque demand, there an order, elsewhere a contract, an act of faith, a confession, a supplication, an act of praise, a hosanna.<sup>417</sup>

It is no wonder then that what we call prayer is described by Mauss as a ‘point of convergence’ of many other religious phenomena and is considered by many as lying at the very heart of religion itself.<sup>418</sup> The manifold nature of the phenomenon of prayer has given rise in both Christian theological and academic scholarship to systems of categorization based primarily on prayer as ‘text’. In this way the character of prayer is determined by the words of the text and its communicative or propositional intent.<sup>419</sup> For instance Catholic theology traditionally holds there to be four primary types of prayer: adoration, thanksgiving, propitiation and supplication. However, there are many more descriptive terms that are employed to classify prayers on the basis of the propositional intent expressed in their words, and these include other such familiar categories as petition, invocation, supplication, dedication, intercession, benediction and confession, to name but a few. These terms convey meanings that have been largely determined by theological thought and they are used for the expression of Church doctrine on prayer. Thomas Csordas in his study of ritual genres amongst Catholic Pentecostals identifies two further types of prayer in addition to the ones that appear above: prayer for divine guidance and

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<sup>417</sup> M. Mauss, *On Prayer*, New York and Oxford: Durkheim Press/Berghahn Books, 2003, p. 21.

<sup>418</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 22.

<sup>419</sup> S. Gill, ‘Prayer’, in L. Jones (ed.) *Encyclopedia of Religion*, Second Edition, Detroit and London: Macmillan, 2005, pp. 7367-7372.

command (as a form of exorcism or healing).<sup>420</sup> However, these also have a historical doctrinal precedent.

In addition to this theological legacy the phenomenon of prayer was subjected to the same kind of positivist evolutionary logic as magic by early sociologists and anthropologists of religion. Frazer, building on Tylor's evolutionary model of religion, considered prayer a higher religious activity reflecting progression in human thought in relation to the magical acts of primitive peoples.<sup>421</sup> Mauss too looked to prayer as an indicator of the stages of advancement of a religion finding its roots in the 'indefinite and rudimentary' forms of prayer of primitive peoples and reaching its zenith in the prayer culture of liberal Protestantism. For Mauss, 'The evolution of prayer is part of the evolution of religion itself; the progress made by prayer is similar to that made by religion'.<sup>422</sup>

The frame within which these early scholars of religion placed the phenomenon of prayer, with their preoccupation with origins and evolution, is itself reinforced by Christian theological claims. Mauss's assertion that religion has moved from the 'mechanical' to the 'spiritual', from the 'communal' to the 'individual', and from 'minimally cerebral' to 'thought and an outpouring of the spirit' both reflects and reifies Christian theological discourse since the Reformation.<sup>423</sup>

These two ways of viewing prayer as 'text' and as evolutionary 'specimen', the first essentially theological and the second explicitly reductionist, have direct bearing on the central question of this thesis: the problematisation of the relationship between 'official' and 'folk' religion. The distinctions made between the two, which were often based on just such theological bias and evolutionary hierarchies, were then applied to two 'separate' spheres of religion. This discourse has determined not only what should be considered 'proper' or 'true' prayer in a theological sense, but has also helped reify distinctions such as those made between 'true' prayer and incantation, and between 'mechanical' and 'spiritual' forms prayer. In the context of Orthodox Christianity the fact

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<sup>420</sup> T. Csordas, 'Genre, Motive and Metaphor: Conditions for Creativity in Ritual Language', *Cultural Anthropology*, 4:2 (1987), pp. 445-469.

<sup>421</sup> Pals, *Seven Theories of Religion*, pp. 36-37.

<sup>422</sup> Mauss, *On Prayer*, p. 23.

<sup>423</sup> *ibid.*, p. 24.

that such distinctions are the product of Western Christian theological and academic discourse further clouds discussions on the practice of prayer.

It is exceedingly difficult to escape the legacy of the discourse that erected these seemingly 'real' and concrete divisions. In the following pages, as we address certain aspects of the prayer life of the Gagauz, the tendency of academics to erect boundaries between various 'genres' of prayer on the basis of a 'meaning-based' approach will become clear. However, as we saw with the case of Gagauz healing ritual explored in the last chapter, by turning our attention away from the strictly 'discursive' aspect of canonical texts and away from the ideal types and genres defined by traditional scholarship, and instead focusing on the context and the actual 'doing' of prayer we open up the possibility of gaining alternative perspectives on what prayer 'does' in and to the individual and the community. Meaning-based approaches to prayer, whether based on semantic or symbolic communication of meaning, often result in the reduction of prayer to 'largely a matter of the message they communicate'.<sup>424</sup> Here we will explore the possibility of approaching prayer acts in a contextual and non-genre centric way.

When prayer is considered as act, the unresponsive and the non-creative dimensions that seem inseparable from the rigidity of words tend to dissolve, for a prayer act always involves one praying in a historical, cultural, social, and psychological setting.<sup>425</sup>

Sam Gill is making the point here that the agency and the individuality of the believer in the 'construction' of their own religiosity, and that of their community, are manifest through the *act of prayer*, and not necessarily through the propositional content of the prayer text, which may be proscribed or highly formulaic. Through a performance approach which treats prayer as one would other forms of religious ritual, it can be viewed as both a 'speech act', highlighting the instrumentality of words or their illocutionary force, as well as viewing it as a ritual action, demonstrating what is 'done' through engaging in an 'act' of prayer in a given context. In other words a performance approach to

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<sup>424</sup> These ideas are explored by Edward Schieffelin in his discussion of the contribution of Bloch and Kapferer to 'performance' approaches to ritual. See E. Schieffelin, 'Performance and the Cultural Construction of Reality', *American Ethnologist*, 12:4 (1985), pp. 707-724.

<sup>425</sup> Gill, 'Prayer', p. 7369.

prayer allows us to explore both 'what is being *done* through the use of words'<sup>426</sup> in the 'speech act' and what is being accomplished by the performance of the act of prayer as a whole. The effect or consequence for the hearer or 'experiencer' of the prayer act, including in this category the performer of the prayer herself or himself, which Austin describes as the 'perlocutionary act', will bring us closer to understanding the 'practical' religious agency of lay believers in the establishment of religious realities.

Very little attention has been given by scholars of religion to this performative aspect of the act of prayer.<sup>427</sup> One reason for this may be that prayer is often associated with the interior spiritual life of the individual believer and some Protestant and liberal theological notions of what prayer 'truly is' seem to remove prayer almost entirely from the public arena. William James, quoting the French Protestant theologian Auguste Sabatier, highlights clearly this individual or personal perspective on prayer.

The act of prayer by which I understand no vain exercise of words, no mere repetition of certain sacred formulae, but the very movement itself of the soul, putting itself in a personal relation of contact with the mysterious power of which it feels the presence...<sup>428</sup>

Approaching prayer that is defined in this way poses certain methodological problems, especially if we wish to investigate the performative aspect of acts of prayer. For example, we can never be entirely sure whether people pray in private in the way they say or demonstrate they do when questioned; they may wish to appear more pious, more learned, or more decorous, theologically speaking, in their prayer life. Prayer observed or recorded in this way may take on the character of a 'performance of a performance'. Tambiah's insights regarding 'stereotyped convention' in ritual which can place ritual actions as 'simulations of intentions' rather than as 'first order' communications of intention would seem to point to a similar problem. Overall the effect may be of distancing the private

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<sup>426</sup> B. Ray, 'Performative Utterances in African Rituals', *History of Religions*, 13 (1973), pp. 16-35.

<sup>427</sup> Besides the works by Gill, Ray and Csordas already cited other notable contribution include Gill's article on Navajo prayer, S. Gill, 'Prayer as Person: The Performative Force in Navajo Prayer Acts', *History of Religions*, 17 (1979), pp. 143-157 and I. Lovasz's work on the performative aspect of Hungarian folk prayer. See I. Lovász, *Szakrális Kommunikáció*, Budapest: Európai Folklór Intézet, 2002.

<sup>428</sup> W. James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, London and Glasgow: Collins, 1971, p. 444.

feelings and emotions of the actor from the direct kind of engaged 'acting out' of private or social sentiments that one might expect to find in acts of prayer.<sup>429</sup>

Of course this kind of personal prayer represents just one aspect of prayer in what might be a prayer culture that encompasses very diverse practices of prayer. It is evident that many forms of prayer, both traditionally and in contemporary Christian settings, are corporate in nature and fulfil a prescribed role in communal worship. In the major European Christian traditions there are also extensive manuals and collections of prayers that are aids and guides to correct practice in personal prayer. Sam Gill's assertion that anyone who engages in private prayer is almost certainly also part of a community in which some sort of ritual or communal prayer is practised seems a reasonable one. Moreover, he goes on to highlight that the evidence we have for personal prayer 'suggests a strong correlation and interdependence of personal prayer with ritual and liturgical prayer in language, form, style, and physical attitude'.<sup>430</sup>

The question of the extent to which 'private' individual prayer is 'received' in the same sense as liturgical, canonical and communal prayer is pertinent for a couple of reasons. The first touches on issues relating to the transmission of religious knowledge. As we saw in previous chapters the transmission of religious knowledge and the establishment of religious 'facts' through practice is one of the concrete ways that the religious agency of believers can be observed. Secondly, as another consequence of the kind of 'stereotyped' behaviour that ritual generates, which Tambiah refers to as 'formality, conventionality, stereotypy, and rigidity', personal prayer, in form and content, may function in just the same way as 'received' prayer and transmit 'unreflective' rather than 'reflective, of the moment' conviction,<sup>431</sup> thus partially dissolving one of the chief distinctions traditionally made between 'personal' and 'corporate' prayer. Finally, sensitivity to any 'fluidity' that exists between traditionally recognised 'genres' or 'forms' of prayer in terms of their performative force may help us move beyond some of the overt characteristics, such as propositional intent or environmental context, that are used to distinguish certain prayer acts one from another. Each of these factors concerning the nature of private, personal or individual prayer in relation to liturgical, canonical or formulaic prayer will be discussed in the pages that follow.

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<sup>429</sup> Tambiah, *Culture, Thought*, pp. 132-133.

<sup>430</sup> Gill, 'Prayer', p. 7369.

<sup>431</sup> Tambiah, *Culture, Thought*, pp. 131-132.

In this chapter and the next I will discuss two particular forms of prayer that occur in Gagauz religious practice that for one reason or another fall beyond the boundary of what constitutes 'true' prayer according to Orthodox Church doctrine. The first group of prayer acts we shall term 'spontaneous' prayer and is typified by its 'fluid' and 'componential' nature. Prayer acts of this kind are generally described using the Gagauz verb *dua etmää*, literally 'to do prayer'. These acts of prayer include the tradition of toast giving, which is the main focus of this section, as well as private prayer said in the morning when rising and in the evening when retiring and at the graveside. The second form, to be discussed in chapter seven, involves the recitation of a more formal *molitva*. This Russian term for prayer is commonly used to refer to prayers with a more or less fixed structure that are read, memorised and repeated based on a 'received' traditional model. The prayers of this type that we shall explore are often referred to as 'archaic', 'apocryphal' or 'folk' prayer in Central and East European scholarship. They differ from the former both in terms of the textual propositional content and the context in which they are performed, which is exclusively private and is also traditionally linked to times of illness or hardship. As we shall go on to demonstrate, neither of these two forms of prayer conforms to the traditional modals or genres discussed above. Before going on to examine these two 'modes' of prayer, we should briefly remind ourselves of the context within which we met acts of prayer and prayer texts in the previous chapters. We shall also consider some general points about prayer amongst the Gagauz, especially in its canonical context; that is as it appears in the liturgy and official prayer manuals and the role these prayers play in Gagauz prayer-life.

In chapter two we considered the liturgy, with its repertoire of canonical prayer, as one of the central vehicles and the primary locus of communal religious life. As we saw, the texts of *molitva*, both canonical and non-canonical, are found amongst the *tetradka* translations, and the *epistolijas* themselves, despite their length, have been used as a form of prayer in lay religious ritual. Indeed, one of the primary sources and means of dissemination of prayer amongst Gagauz are the *tetradkas*. On the whole, prayers, alongside hymns, *epistolijas* and apocalypses, are collected, translated and exchanged through this medium rather than being committed to memory; a particular case in point is the apocryphal legend *Panaiyan Düşü*, which appears variously in the form of a prayer, a hymn or legendary narrative.



Also, in the previous two chapters we discussed prayer in regard to the healing practices of the *ilaççi*. Formal Christian prayers were shown to be a component in the text of healing rituals and indeed many *okumak* charms according to the healing practitioners are formed solely from such canonical prayer material. In this regard we also mentioned the evolutionary models that have been used, by early anthropologists especially, to explain the historical and functional relationship between canonical prayers and magico-religious formulae of the kind used by the Gagauz *ilaççi*. Much of what was said in previous chapters with regard to these forms of prayer and charms will inform the discussion that follows.

### 6.1 Prayer, Tradition and Agency

Christian prayer has a form and a history. Generally speaking, Christians learn the conventions of prayer from their Church, their family and the community. We may refer to this as the 'received tradition'. What we term 'tradition' covers a far more complex concept than might first appear. The form, content and structure of prayer, the foundations of which are anchored in scripture, the liturgy and established practices, both within and without the church, are passed on through the generations. However, this process of transmission of the norms and rules of prayer is also subject to history and the social, cultural and political conditioning that time inevitably brings with it.<sup>432</sup> Seen in this way tradition is not a 'static structure' but arises out of a combination of 'what is received from the past, and [the] present aspirations of the community' determined by the present historical situation.<sup>433</sup> The construction of tradition in the present is as much part of the process as the elements that are received from the past. Therefore the agency of the living is a vital component of any tradition as it is they who hold an 'attitude' toward the past that encourages, or perhaps sometimes compels, them to accept knowledge and then to pass it on. The agency of believers with regard to tradition can of course be at once both an innovating as well as a 'traditionalizing' force. The shape, scope, context and orientation of prayer amongst the Gagauz bears witness to such processes of historical change configured

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<sup>432</sup> Lang, *Sacred Games*, p. 102.

<sup>433</sup> G. Grieve and R. Weiss, 'Illuminating the Half-Life of Tradition: Legitimation, Agency and Counter-Hegemonies', in S. Engler and G. Grieve (eds.) *Historicizing 'Tradition' in the Study of Religions*, Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2005, p. 5.

by the agency of believers in the community. Indeed, the idea of tradition is inseparable from that of community 'as a group of people that inherits tradition, or is constrained by a set of binding narratives and behaviours'.<sup>434</sup> As we have seen, the bounded nature of communities, whether linguistically, culturally or politically, who are in geographical (or virtual) proximity and interact to create the means of transmission of values, ideas and texts, can set them apart from other groups or communities. However, in the examples we have explored amongst the Gagauz, it is clear that lay and Church institutional structures can operate to transcend community boundaries; discourses and practices generated far from the geographical community can and do become institutionalised in the 'local' setting.

Processes of acculturation, synthesis and survival have, over time, created various strata within the prayer life of Gagauz communities that speak of their recent history. However, as Malinowski first observed, the presence of discrete 'survivals' within contemporary religious or cultural practices can inform our understanding of their function in religious life today. Put more simply, religious practices 'survive', or continue their journey of transmission for a reason, and as Gregory Grieve and Richard Weiss point out, 'actors consider their traditions to be timely, relevant in all times'. But this attitude toward past knowledge is not necessarily a 'conscious' one and as Grieve and Weiss go on to state, it can range from what appears as 'unconscious' habit to the very conscious invention of tradition.<sup>435</sup> Whilst ancient or archaic practices are valorised as traditions worth preserving or reviving, often by elites, other, perhaps more 'unconscious' traditions, go un-remarked as these are reproduced and replicated as the 'norm', the obvious or out of habit.

In our earlier discussions on the nature of lay agency we approached the problem in terms of 'enabling and restraining' factors. We should spend a little time here to consider the character of these factors when discussing the distinction between 'conscious' and 'unconscious' traditions. If we consider that 'conscious' traditions presuppose an element of reflection on the part of agents with regard to their value and role, 'unconscious' traditions might be characterised by their unreflective nature. Of course, this distinction is not hard and fast. Paul Connerton, in his discussion of Oakeshott's theory of 'conscious'

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<sup>434</sup> Flood, *Beyond Phenomenology*, p. 176.

<sup>435</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 3-5.

and 'unconscious' moral behaviour, describes how 'unconscious' habits are not learned but are acquired, in much the same way as language, by 'living with people who habitually behave in a certain manner'. In order to perform this kind of 'unconscious' action there is no need to consciously apply 'rules and precepts'; one merely continues in the way one has been shown.<sup>436</sup> This is not to say that this becomes mere repetition in a causal sense but rather, as Paul Connerton goes on to suggest based on Winch's ideas, as when one has learned or acquired a language, one is able to produce meaningful 'sentences' that have not been encountered before but which are nevertheless the 'correct way to proceed'. Here we can see that, despite the ascription of the label 'unconscious' to this type of action, within this concept there is also the understanding that a set of rules have been acquired and regardless of the structures inherited as 'force of habit' the actions that are identified as 'unconscious' remain 'meaningful actions' and are not relegated to mere reflexes.<sup>437</sup>

Now let us turn our attention to the inherited structures themselves, or what we might term the 'grammar' of the unconscious tradition, and the forces that underlie them. As we have seen, the agent of tradition seems to have his/her agency constrained by a set of rules that are not referred to consciously but which nevertheless operate as a 'moderator' of what is right and wrong behaviour within a given tradition. In this sense the agent is 'subjected' to the structures of the 'grammar' of tradition, which they reproduce each time the tradition is performed. Louis Althusser's concept of ideological state apparatuses may serve as a useful tool here for understanding the operation of these structures.<sup>438</sup> These relate to institutions that 'produce and reproduce meanings and values', whether within familial, religious, political or economic systems, and they 'have the effect of securing our conscious or unconscious consent to the way things are'.<sup>439</sup> Because our unconscious traditions, like the way we string words into sentences, seem to be the natural and the obvious way to proceed, they are a particularly powerful means of underscoring the status quo and masking the 'real' beneficial or detrimental nature of our present course of action. The agent appears to be 'subjected' to tradition and confined to the meanings and structures that it permits, 'condemned to citationality' and the reproduction of 'ideologies' within established parameters. Pierre Bourdieu offers a similar explanation of this process

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<sup>436</sup> P. Connerton, *How Societies Remember*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989, p. 29.

<sup>437</sup> *Ibid*, p. 30.

<sup>438</sup> See L. Althusser, *Essays on Ideology*, London and New York: Verso, pp. 1-61.

<sup>439</sup> C. Belsey, *Poststructuralism*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002, pp. 34-39.

with his notion of the *habitus*. *Habitus* is at once the basis of ‘perception and appreciation’ of the individual, which is shaped by their experience of reality and which, in turn shapes our actions and reactions in certain ways, structuring and shaping ‘practice’ or action and with it the environment or *field* within which individuals operate.<sup>440</sup> According to Althusser, in order to break free of such powerful ‘constraining’ forces requires the presence of an ‘ideology’ that challenges the ruling order and in so doing produces new or alternative ‘subject positions’.<sup>441</sup> As we shall see, the institutions or structures that influence traditions of prayer are not confined to what we might consider the ‘domain’ of the religious field as they include aspects of, on the one hand, the realm of politics and economics, and on the other hand, the ‘divergent’ and ‘covert’ non-canonical religious world of the *epistoliyas* and apocryphas.

Prayer is an area of Gagauz religious life that, in much the same way as healing, has been neglected by ethnographers and literary historians in favour of ‘traditions’ that evoke more distant times. As we saw in chapter one, traditions of *Kurban*, *Allahlık* and *Hacılık*, which today are no longer or seldom practised, could be and were instrumentalised as cultural markers on the basis of their perceived authenticity and ethnocentric specificity. Once again we can look for an explanation to the institutional attitudes toward religion in the Soviet era as well as the predilection of local ethnographers trained in the ‘nationalist’ and Soviet schools for a form of ‘cultural archaeology’ that attempts to trace what are identified as ‘ethnically specific’ traits in the search for origins. In the kind of emphasis on ‘survivals’ that Malinowski was arguing against, aspects of Gagauz tradition considered of more recent provenance are relegated to the bottom of a hierarchy of ‘authenticity’. A remark made by a contemporary Gagauz ethnographer, Elizaveta Kvilinkova, that the Gagauz have ‘no prayer culture of their own’ can be read in the light of these tendencies.<sup>442</sup>

As we shall see shortly, the two forms of Gagauz prayer that we are primarily concerned with in this chapter and the next operate in two different spheres of community;

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<sup>440</sup> T. Ray, *Bourdieu on Religion: Imposing Faith and Legitimacy*, London and Oakville: Equinox, 2007, pp. 46-50.

<sup>441</sup> Ibid., p. 34.

<sup>442</sup> In the course of a conversation with Elizaveta Kvilinkova she supported her observation by stating that historically priests would teach betrothed couples the Lord’s Prayer and that they would refuse to marry couples that could not recite it on the day of their wedding, the inference being that if at marriageable age young people were still not familiar with the most basic prayer of the Church they must surely have been without any form of prayer culture at all.

one is public and socially based and the other private and located in the family, and they also have varying historical 'pedigrees' within the community. The focus of this study thus far has fallen on informal religious specialists, primarily the *klisecilär*, amongst whom we find the translators of the *epistolijas*, and often also the *ilaççis*. These practitioners form part of a loosely recognised group who in the past may have led religious activities, were central to the revival of Orthodoxy in the post-Soviet era, and who are still consulted in regard to local religious traditions. The practices and activities of these 'personalities' should be seen as 'extraordinary' in the sense that they reflect a level of engagement in the religious sphere that is more visible and identifiable than that of the ordinary practitioner. Their activities also connect them intimately with the two *loci* of religious tradition that are often referred to as 'official' and 'folk'. We have seen how the expression of their authority and their scope for agency are regulated by clerical authority, which sometimes brings them into conflict with the Church and we have also explored how their *parlance* with spiritual and divine agents and the role of language in the performance of 'texts' operate as the basis for the establishment of religious institutional facts. The role these 'specialists' play is a more or less visible one, which in the case of the *ilaççi* especially is reinforced by explicit acts of healing. The forms of prayer that we introduced in the previous chapters, those connected to rituals performed around the *epistolijas* and utilized in healing rituals, relate to the activities of these religious specialists, in the sense that they were either translated, 'received' or performed by a specialist.

The prayers and the acts of prayer that we shall discuss in the following pages are those of non-specialists. They were either observed at social or religious gatherings or were demonstrated on request as examples of the practice of daily prayer from members of the community I met over the course of my time in *Gagauziya*. As we highlighted above, the personal prayer-life of individuals does not exist in a vacuum and what may appear to be 'unconscious' traditions driven by conformity or habit or by 'outpourings of the soul' may also have been influenced by more 'consciously' driven agency. Most directly we can observe this in the 'tradition' of Gagauz language prayer sponsored by the Orthodox Church.

## 6.2 Canonical Prayer and Clerical Agency

As we discussed in chapter two, our knowledge of the practice of prayer amongst the Gagauz goes back only as far as the early 20<sup>th</sup> century when we have our first report from Moshkoff of the occasional use of *karamanli* literature in church services alongside Romanian and Church Slavonic. Moskoff also cites a Gagauz language version of the Lord's Prayer in the same work, which differs quite considerably from later translations. Atanas Manov, in his collection of Gagauz folklore of the Gagauz of Bulgaria, also reports in passing on the use of *Karamanli* religious literature.<sup>443</sup> Today traces of *karamanli* can still be found in religious folklore, especially folksongs. However, the tradition of using *karamanli* prayers during church worship has passed beyond living memory.<sup>444</sup>

Despite these slightly earlier reports, the beginnings of Gagauz-language church life are generally dated to the first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century when the Priest Mihail Çakir began publishing his translations of liturgical texts. The first of these publications was his *Kratkii Slavyano-Gagauzskii Molitvennik: Kısa dua kitabı: Slavânca (hem) Gagauzça*, 'A Short Prayer Book in Slavonic and Gagauzian',<sup>445</sup> published in 1908 with parallel texts in the two languages. This was followed in 1935 by a second edition published using Latin characters following the orthographic rules of the Romanian language.<sup>446</sup> Çakir's translations of canonical prayers are justly considered a milestone in the history of Gagauz religious life. However, due to Romanian efforts to implement the use of Romanian in the liturgy after over a century of dominance of Church Slavonic, Çakir's was not as successful in instigating Church life in the local vernacular in the inter-war period.

The accounts of the elderly informants demonstrate the impact that wider political changes in the status of the territory of Bessarabia had on the prayer life of the community.

I first learned to pray in Moldavian [Romanian] at school, *Tatul Nostru* [Our Father in Romanian]. But at home I learned *Otche Nash* [Our Father in Russian] from my mother. My father had been a school teacher in the Russian times so they [her parents] prayed in

<sup>443</sup> A. Manov, *Gagauzlar (Hiristiyan Türkler)*, Ankara: Türk Tarihi Kurumu Başimevi, 2001, p. 125.

<sup>444</sup> The influence of *karamanli* literature on the development of the Gagauz liturgical language was discussed in chapter two.

<sup>445</sup> *Kratkii Slavyano-Gagauzskii Molitvennik: Kısa dua kitabı: Slavânca (hem) Gagauzça*, Kishinev: Hristosun Doumasının Doorusaltanath Kışnoflu Kardaşlın Tiparı, 1908.

<sup>446</sup> *Dua Chitabâ Gagauzlar için*, Chişinău: Tiparul Moldovenesc, 1935.

Russian. But then later I learned to pray at school. I knew lots of Romanian prayers and I still pray in Romanian. But when the Russians came [back after 1944] I learned in Russian [again].

(Kirma Trandafilova Darya, born 1934, village of Avdarma, 29.10.05)

At the time of writing many of the older generation, often as a matter of preference but also due to lack of knowledge of Russian, pray in the Romanian language. However, this situation is destined to change quite quickly as the generation born before the end of the Second World War gradually passes.

That is not to say that Çakir's translations of Church prayers did not enter the religious practice of believers. During the decades of Soviet rule, and probably earlier in the inter-war years when original copies of the 1908 and the 1935 editions of the prayer book were extremely rare, prayers were copied into the *tetradkas* and disseminated in this way alongside the *epistolias* and apocalypses. It is difficult to say whether Çakir's translations supplanted earlier orally transmitted variants of 'Our Father' and 'The Creed' that may have been in common usage in earlier times, but if we accept Moskov's report at face value this could well be the case.<sup>447</sup>

Today it is quite common for the generation that grew up under Soviet rule, those in their 50s and 60s, to pray in the Gagauz language. This shift is partly due to the changes in the political situation and the attitude of the Church towards the language of worship, which sponsored the adoption of this new and very 'conscious' tradition when Churches began to reopen in the early 1990s.<sup>448</sup> However, another contributing factor was undoubtedly the activity of the *tetradka* translators, which we discussed at some length in chapter 2, during the period of church closures from the 1950s to the late 1980s. The republication of Çakir's 1908 edition of the *Kısa dua kitabı*, which was realised with the financial support of the Gagauz minority in Greece, has also contributed to the fact that most Gagauz believers today have some knowledge of canonical prayers in the local idiom.

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<sup>447</sup> Bulgar, 'Stranitsy Istorii', p. 10.

<sup>448</sup> This was certainly the case in the villages of *Kazayak*, *Avdarma*, *Tomay* and *Beşalma* where much of the research for this study was conducted. However, in a minority of villages that today are not served by ethnic Gagauz priests, for obvious reasons this could not take place.

### 6.3 The Character of Orthodox Prayer

*Durmaksız dua ediniz. Herşeydä şükür ediniz: zerä sizin hakınızda Allahın istedii buydur Hristos İisusta.*

Pray continually; give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus. (1 Thessalonians 5:17-18)

The above lines from scripture open Çakır's 1908 edition of the *Kısa dua kitabı*. The *Kısa dua kitabı*, like all standard Orthodox prayer manuals, contains a selection of morning prayers, evening prayers, prayers to be said throughout the day, such as before and after meals, prayers for the dead, and Hymns and anthems of great feast days. As Çakır's opening lines indicate, the *dua kitabı* is designed to guide and give help to believers in their efforts to honour St. Paul's admonition to engage in continual prayer and to give thanks whatever the situation.

Some of the prayers in the *dua kitabı* are integral to the Church's liturgical cycle, whilst others are intended for personal use and are linked to daily activities. The purpose of such manuals for Orthodox believers is three-fold and is explained in the following terms by the Russian theologian Nicolas Zernov.

First, they train themselves in the best traditions of prayer, avoiding many dangers which surround those who are not yet experienced in the school of the spiritual life. Secondly, they keep their bond of unity with other Eastern Christians, independently of their nationality or of the age to which they belong. [...] Thirdly, these prayers are a powerful safeguard of the continuity of the prayer-life. There are moments in the life of every Christian when of its own impetus prayer pours out from the depth of his heart: but there are hours and days when only by force of will or by the strength of habit can a Christian bring himself to pray.<sup>449</sup>

They are therefore designed for the inexperienced as a defence from error, to maintain unity amongst all Orthodox, and finally to offer stability in the maintenance of daily prayer. However, despite the accent here being on aid for the individual in their personal

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<sup>449</sup> N. Zernov, 'Explanatory Notes', in *A Manual of Eastern Orthodox Prayers*, New York: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1983, p. x.



prayer-life, Orthodox theology emphasizes the essential unity of the address through prayer that Christians make to the Lord.<sup>450</sup>

An Eastern Christian does not approach God as an isolated individual; he worships him as a member of the body of Christ. His supplications do not rise up like the voice of a solo singer. They form part of a great choir in which all the Saints and all the sinners have their share.<sup>451</sup>

The dual character of the address to the Lord is stated explicitly by the Romanian theologian Dimitru Staniloaie: 'We do not ask God for something without first praising him; we do not praise God without asking him for something.'<sup>452</sup> In prayer, praise and appeal go hand in hand. The prayer below, a slightly 'folklorised' oral version of the liturgical prayer *Ūç kerä Ayož* or the Trisagion, fits precisely the modal described above.

*Ayož Allah, Ayož kuvetli,  
Deer Ayož, hepsi Ölümsüz, hayırla Sän bizi,  
Ayož Allah, Ayož kuvetli,  
Deer Ayož, hepsi Ölümsüz, kurtar Sän dä bizi.*

Holy God, Holy and Mighty,  
Say Holy all Immortal, have mercy on us.  
Holy God, Holy and Mighty,  
Say Holy all Immortal, save us.

The prayer first praises *Allah* and then calls on him to have mercy and save the believer. However, the performance of such prayers outside the context of the liturgy can be tied to more immediate concrete goals than that of salvation. This prayer in particular, perhaps because of its reference to the power of God, was used by my informant in the event of extreme weather conditions.

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<sup>450</sup> We do not have space within the context of this study to discuss the Hesychast tradition and the practice of the 'Jesus Prayer'. In Russian and Romanian Orthodoxy, and especially so in Romanian Moldavia, this largely monastic practice of meditational prayer is going through a revival. However, this tradition does not seem to be influencing the prayer life of Gagauz lay believers.

<sup>451</sup> Zernov, 'Explanatory Notes', p. xi.

<sup>452</sup> Staniloaie, 'The Holy Spirit', p. 13.

So when it is raining in the lightning and thunder, you sing in this way.

(Domniku Kuru İvanovna, village of Gajdar, 09.06.2004)

When there is a storm we take a candle that has been blessed at Easter and light it and sing *Ayoz Allah, Ayoz kuvetli*,...

(Elena Çakir , village of Beşalma, 08.06.2004)

The function of the prayer in its extra-liturgical context cannot be read from the discursive content of the text. It has become a response by the believer directed toward God in the face of extreme weather. This function is not contingent on the text of the prayer but on other factors such as the 'received' understanding of the believer, traditional communal practice, and individual emotional response in particular circumstances. The prayer is part of the 'conscious' tradition of the Church in terms of form and structure but also operates as part of the grammatical repertoire of 'unconscious' traditions of prayer in response to danger and uncertainty. These contextual factors are central to the performance of prayer and require consideration in regard to both official canonical prayer and forms of prayer that arise beyond the formal structuring influence of the Church. The context of the prayer delivers its meaning and is also the mark or the indicator of the intention and the agency of the person praying.

Praying using canonical prayers in the way described above is not considered by the clergy to be counter to Church teachings. The attitude of village priests toward the use of 'Our Father' by village healers, which we discussed in the previous chapter, gives support to the understanding that in the Church's eyes the status of the prayer as 'prescribed text' takes precedence over notions of function and 'context'. As we mentioned above, the Church teaches, publishes and disseminates prayers for all kinds of situations or circumstances to help believers address the divine in the appropriate manner. These prayers have to be learnt verbatim, are used reflectively as part of a conscious 'tradition' and always maintain their status as institutional forms of expression for communication with the divine. We should remind ourselves at this point of the distinction we drew earlier between what is here termed 'communication' with the divine, the formal act of delivering a propositional message with discursive intent, and the concept of the act of prayer, which as we have discussed, includes several other dimensions.

When it comes to addressing traditions of prayer that fall beyond the scope of those described above, traditions that can be described as ‘extra-ecclesial’ or ‘non-canonical’, their status, from a clerical and traditional academic standpoint, clearly depends on the discursive content of the text, in the sense that this can be read and determined to be outside the ‘canon’ by members of the clergy or the informed observer. Such ‘text-based’ interpretations gave birth to vast collections of ‘folk’ Christian texts, especially in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, that divorce entirely the text from their context. However, for the lay practitioner, this kind of distinction is decidedly alien. Often believers are not aware of the status of the text vis-à-vis the Church or even aware of the nature of such distinctions as ‘canonical’ and ‘apocryphal’, which are after all distinctions that originate in theological and academic discourse. This is certainly the case with regard to ‘The Dream of the Mother of God’, about which several informants reported being completely perplexed as to why their Priest regards this prayer as in someway ‘beyond the pale’. However, the practitioner will be acutely aware of the appropriate context and function of the prayer acts they themselves engage in. Certain forms of prayer act are reserved for certain contexts, which in turn are allied to functional or practical aims. The two forms of ‘extra-ecclesial’ prayer we shall be looking at in the following pages, the *dua* toast-prayer and the archaic ‘Passion’ prayer (in chapter 7), illustrate this point with regard to two very different kinds of text performed in very different contexts.

#### 6.4 Toast-Prayer and the Social Performance of Cosmological Reality

In the Gagauz language the term *dua etmää* refers to a form of speech act that for speakers of English would be considered two distinct and quite separate concepts, the act of prayer and that of toasting with alcohol. The broad meaning that *dua etmää* carries in the Gagauz language is one inherited from its etymological source in Arabic and the terminological distinctions that are drawn in the Islamic world between categories of prayer are mirrored in the already briefly mentioned distinction in the Gagauz language between the term *dua* and *molitva*.

The Arabic term دعا (du‘ā) in an Islamic context is reserved for informal forms of direct address of the divine as opposed to ritual forms of prayer, which in Turkish for example would be *namaz*. A similar distinction is discernable in the Gagauz language

although this is not universal and nor is it as clear-cut as the Islamic distinction. This relates to the use of the Church Slavonic term *molitva*, which in colloquial Gagauz usage is reserved for forms of prayer that rely on a fixed written or orally transmitted text. These prayers, due to their connection with the Church and written culture, are referred to, although not exclusively, using the Church Slavonic term. *Molitva* never appears to be used for the kind of spontaneous or direct prayer, which links the Gagauz term *dua* semantically with its Arabic roots.

*Dua*, therefore, and its verbal derivative *dua etmää*, can be used to cover a whole range of speech acts that we should understand as some form of 'direct' address of the divine. Within this broad meaning the term *dua etmää* is used to refer to the act of toast giving. The etymology of the term therefore implicitly expresses the religious character of the activity. This is made explicit when we consider that the structural formula around which toasts are built is addressed to the audience in the presence of *Allah* or conversely, depending on your reading, is addressed to *Allah* in the presence of a gathered company. It is to this very public form of 'toast-prayer' that we shall turn our attention first.

Viticulture has an exceptional place in Gagauz economic, cultural and political life and its significance is also reflected in the sphere of religion. The large-scale cultivation of grapes and the production of wine were initiated in the Bujak steppe only as late as the 1880s and 90s. Following the settlement of colonists from the Balkans in the closing decades of the 18<sup>th</sup> century and the early 19<sup>th</sup> century the majority of land had been allocated to the new settlers leaving little of the steppe for further exploitation. There was also very limited forested land in the region that could be turned over to agriculture as until this time the steppe had been grazed by vast herds of cattle, sheep and horses belonging to the previous occupiers of the region, the Nogay Tartars. Land that had been sufficient for the first two generations of settlers was no longer able to support the third and fourth who had to look for additional sources of income. The planting of vineyards served a dual purpose in that vines could be planted on land unsuitable for other forms of agriculture and, in a region prone to drought, would produce a crop in even the driest of years.<sup>453</sup>

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<sup>453</sup> S. Bulgar, 'Razvitie sel'skohozyaystvennogo Proizvodstva, Remestel, Promislov i Rinka v Poseleniyah Gagauzov i Bolgar Posle Reform 70-x Godov XIX v.' in Bulgar, *Istoriya i Kultura Gagauzov*, pp. 464-476.

Today many Gagauz smallholders and farmers are reliant on the income from the grape harvest each autumn, which forms a large proportion of their surplus crop production. There are also *vinogradne zavod* or 'wine factories' in several villages, inherited from the soviet collectives but now largely privately owned and run, which are one of the few opportunities for wage labour in the local economy. In addition to this economic activity householders in Gagauz villages, almost without exception, produce their own homemade wine for domestic consumption. The male heads of Gagauz households take pride in demonstrating their wine-making skills and tasting household wines, often in the wine cellar itself, is a standard part of the ritual of receiving guests.

Members of the clergy are also engaged in small-scale wine production, as they are with other forms of local agriculture. In this way they continue the commonplace tradition, which in the case of Moldova is also very much an economic necessity for the Orthodox clergy, of a close connection with the economic life of the local community with whom they also frequently have close family ties. The message that the local clergy convey with regard to wine consumption calls for moderation. However, conversely, this message is tempered by scorn for those that refuse to partake of wine altogether, which is judged to be in some way 'un-Christian'. On occasion local priests made the association of abstention from wine with Islam and the influence of Muslim Turks. The kind of prohibition practised by local Baptists who form a significant and increasing minority amongst the Gagauz, on the other hand, was according to one local priest, considered to be a rejection of the scriptural modals of behaviour set by Jesus himself at the wedding in Cana, and also of Jesus's call to the disciples to drink of his blood at the Last Supper. The powerful symbolism of wine that is integral to Christian Eucharistic ritual needs no explanation here. However, with regard to the specifics of Gagauz religious practice, and especially male religiosity, the production and communal consumption of wine link the religious cosmological worldview with the contemporary existential concerns of the Gagauz people.

In the Soviet period, when Moldova was one of the few major wine producing regions of the whole USSR, several wine manufacturing units were opened in Gagauz settlements. The villages of *Kazayak* (Cazaclia) and *Tomay* (Tomai) both have their local wine production *zavod*. These economic units were one of the major employers of local people. Since the break up of the Soviet Union wine producers in Moldova have found it increasingly difficult to remain competitive, having lost their captive market in Russia. The

difficulties faced by Gagauz wine producers, as well as by small-scale producers of grapes, were exacerbated by the imposition by Russia in spring 2006 of import restrictions on wine and other agricultural products from Moldova and Georgia. These restrictions imposed by Russia, ostensibly on the grounds that Moldovan producers were failing to meet required health standards, have been seen by ruling politicians and political observers to be a punishment for recent pro-western rhetoric of the Moldovan government, especially with regard to negotiations on the future of the Russian dominated break-away region of Transnistria.<sup>454</sup> Relations between Russia and Moldova in the Post-Soviet era have become increasingly delicate and the Gagauz dimension further complicates the issues between the two sides. Certainly in the short to medium term the economic survival of the region depends largely on the relations that were forged in the immediate post-Soviet years between local producers and migrant workers from *Gagauziya* on the one hand and Russian capital and employers on the other. In the absence of significant alternative markets and labour opportunities the fate of Gagauz farmers and wine producers is thus linked to the wider political fate of Moldova. Conversely, the economic, and possibly also the political, viability of the Gagauz Autonomous Region depends on the ability of Gagauz producers to generate wealth from the wine sector.

The ingredients of this cauldron of uncertainty are connected closely to the most powerful symbolic elements of Gagauz identity, namely loyalty to Russia and her Church as the historic saviour and provider, the almost exalted status of the grape and vine as both the economic and ethno-religious 'life-blood' of the people, and finally antagonism towards Moldovan state authority, which is seen as the main barrier to economic prosperity. The above factors have ensured that the concerns surrounding the production and consumption of local wine are at the centre of Gagauz economic, political and social discourse. At the micro local family and communal level these existential concerns find

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<sup>454</sup> Unlike the very brief conflict that erupted between the Gagauz and central Moldovan authorities in the early 90s, which was settled with little bloodshed, the Transnistrian conflict has proved more intractable. Although ethnically Transnistria is much like the rest of Moldova, with only slightly higher proportions of Russians and Ukrainians, the population has weaker historical ties with territories over the river Nister to the west than with the east. Significantly it is also home to a large proportion of Moldova's heavy industry, including some arms factories. The fate of this breakaway region may yet play a role in determining the future orientation of the Republic of Moldova with a newly assertive Russia increasingly willing to use the territory as a bargaining chip to assure Moldovan economic and political dependency on Russia and to prevent the possibility of further progress on European integration. Any final outcome of the Transnistrian problem will have obvious implications for the future of *Gagauziya*. On the geo-political aspects of the conflict see King, *The Moldovans*, pp. 178-208.

expression within the frame of the social ritual of toast giving, which, as we highlighted above, also acts as one of the primary spheres within which male religiosity especially finds expression.

The 'meta-description' of toast-giving that follows illustrates the usual course of events when a group, usually men, partake of communal drinking. However, this same pattern can also be observed within mixed groups of men and women. The ritual of toast giving, as we shall see, is considered 'prayer' in more than just name and it is governed by similar regulations or conventions that are applied to prayer in other contexts. A simple example is the taboo on smoking when addressing the Lord, which is also observed when making a toast. One informant, whilst carefully and purposefully placing his cigarette to one side reached for the toasting glass and said with confidence: 'One shouldn't pray to *Allah* with a cigarette in hand!' Also, when toasts are being said a certain degree of formality is maintained and the gathered company generally pay close attention to what is 'spoken' in the toast. However, the clearest indication of the religious dimension of toast giving is the ubiquitous address to *Allah* at every toast.

The form which toast making generally takes involves the passing of a single glass clock-wise around the assembled company. 'Each' person in turn is offered the glass, which is then filled from a wine jug or bottle. With glass in hand this person then offers his/her *dua* or prayer. The toast-prayer act itself follows a simple formula. First, the speaker offers a short prayer such as the one that follows.

*Allah versin saalık, mir, bereket, yaamurcuk!*

May God give us health, peace, a plentiful harvest and rain!

This is followed by a communal response of *Allah versin!* May God grant it! The glass is then passed on to the next person and then so on around the gathered company.

The content, length and scope of the *dua* varies considerably, especially as those present become gradually more inebriated. The kind of toasts that result from more prolonged drinking sessions were described by another observer of Gagauz culture as 'emotional, complicated, sophisticated in [to] the extent of endless socio-philosophical speeches'.<sup>455</sup> However, what characterises all toast *dua* is the expression of a wish or

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<sup>455</sup> From comments made by Nikolas Luka in our correspondence regarding Gagauz toasting culture.

wishes for the future. These relate overwhelmingly to the existential concerns of the gathered company and the wider community. The following examples offer a representative selection of the kind of toasts often heard.

*Allah versin bereket, yaamurcuk, şarap hem ekmek, olsun hepsi  
islää bizdä hem sizdä dä!*

May God grant a good harvest, rain, wine and bread. Let everything  
be well with us and also with you!

*Allah versin olsun düüinedä mir, annaşmak, cenk olmasın!*

May God grant that there be peace in the world, that there be no  
war!

*Sayalım biri birimizi, dartışmak, çekişmək aramızda olmasın.*

May we respect one another, may there be no conflict between us!

*Allah versin saalık, hep ölä buluşalım ötää dooru da.*

May God give us good health and may we meet like this again in the  
future.

*Baariş olmasın bu düüinedä!*

Let there not be war in this world!<sup>456</sup>

Having discussed the social, political and economic context of Gagauz toasting culture and introduced examples of the ‘text’ of toasts, what follows is a discussion of first the ‘discursive’ and then the ‘performative’ aspects of these acts of prayer.

## 6.5 Citation, Discourse and Memory

From the ‘text’ of these toasts we can read explicit references to *Allah* and to agriculture, group social harmony/relations, bodily health and good wishes towards guests. None of this would seem out of the ordinary for a largely rural agricultural society that still relies on familial and local communal cooperation and harmony in the pursuit of commonly held livelihoods. These are concerns and relations that the Gagauz themselves may take for granted, and the observer too when attempting to experience Gagauz culture at first hand may find them unremarkable, but as Roland Barthes strived to demonstrate what we take

<sup>456</sup> Additional examples of toasting prayers were supplied by Nikolas Luka.



for granted in our culture, the 'falsely obvious', can often tell us most about our value systems.<sup>457</sup>

Even as an outside observer it is only with the benefit of several months distance from the Gagauz cultural milieu that seemingly mundane and often repeated formulas begin to reveal their relevance and what at the time appeared to be the most natural and ordinary of practices reveal their extraordinary ability to 'speak' about Gagauz religious and cultural practices. The very nature of the toast-prayer, which invites participation by all present, including the outsider, gave me the opportunity to reflect on the 'incompetence' of the ethnographer in such ritual situations but also heightened awareness of conventions and rules of the ritual situation. Initially, I had to muster all my Gagauz linguistic skills in order to contribute a toast during communal drinking; the process involved the imitation of gestures and turns of phrase, whilst at the same time trying to say something that would have meaning for both my drinking partners and myself. The act of participating in the ritual of toasting helped me to appreciate the strictly bounded nature of the micro-discourse that unfolds within toast-prayers and shape my awareness of limits and channels of what is said within the ritual context.

The spoken toasting formulas outlined above display the characteristics of the kind of 'unconscious' tradition described earlier, one which has not been part of a conscious revival or reflective process that seeks to reinforce religious or cultural values. However, as an 'unconscious' tradition it is still subject to a set of 'grammatical' rules, which the culture-bearers themselves may or may not take account of or be able to articulate, that give it structure and meaning within the religious system and which even when drunk are not overtly contravened or challenged. The frequency of use of toast-prayers and non-deviation from cultural norms are a powerful 'traditionalising' force. So natural do the traditional formulas appear within this structure, even to the outside observer, that it is difficult to appreciate their currency and cumulative power to shape the religious worldview and social landscape of the community.

One important recognition with regard to their propositional content is that some of the most commonly expressed concerns that these toasts reflect are gradually becoming part of a past mode of existence rather than a present one. Increasingly families are dependent on factors such as the black market economy, job prospects in Russia or Turkey,

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<sup>457</sup> R. Barthes, *Mythologies*, London: Vintage, 2000, p. 11.

visa regimes, and transport costs rather than rain and a good harvest. These changes, especially the reliance on migrant labour, are radically transforming the social order.<sup>458</sup> The wishes for the future that are expressed in the prayers are habitually offered and reinforce an image of the society that is in the process of passing out of existence. Wishes for peace and good health, for example, remain very real concerns that are linked to almost timeless situations, as well as to the 'everyday', but toast prayers also reference past situations and states of being. It is this internalised understanding of the nature and scope of one's worldly existence that has been absorbed from the structures of the *habitus*, as Bourdieu describes, that in turn determine, within the context of toast-prayers, the relationship to *Allah* and His relationship to the physical world within which Gagauz lives are lived. As well as being part of a reaffirmation of the social order the tradition also establishes the cosmological context within which the society operates. The hopes and wishes expressed in the toast giving *dua* are those that are appropriate, within the established structure, to turn to *Allah* with and therefore by inference the issues which *Allah* in turn is considered to determine, is understood to be concerned with and can be expected to influence. It is the 'compulsion to citation' of these cultural values and aspirations that ensures the reinforcement of traditional modes of thinking and acting and they therefore also shape the expectations of relations with the divine. For example, by citing war, conflict, and discord or *cenk*, *dartışmak*, *çekışmāk* and *baariş*, in their *dua* the toast givers reproduce and reaffirm the social reality of war and conflict in contemporary discourse. Likewise, with regard to references to the harvest and rain, which reaffirm the primacy of reliance on the soil and agriculture. It is remarkable the extent to which the supplications of toast-prayers mirror the medieval closing formulas of the archaic prayers we shall discuss in the following chapter. It would be misleading to overstate the significance of these examples from this one particular 'corner' of Gagauz religious life but their saliency is strengthened by their frequency and by their almost singular status, as expressions of male religiosity in day-to-day life.

The 'citationality' to which we are referring is of course not just confined to the 'discursive' aspect of the toast prayers. This kind of tradition, which Connerton connects with that aspect of memory that is based on 'habit', is also inherently performative.

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<sup>458</sup> Keough, L., 'Globalizing 'Postsocialism': Mobile Mothers and Neoliberalism on the Margins of Europe', *Anthropological Quarterly*, 3:79 (2006), p. 432.

For the meaning of a social habit rests upon others' conventional expectations such that it must be interpretable as a socially legitimate (or illegitimate performance). Social habits are essentially legitimating performances. And if habit-memory is inherently performative, then social habit-memory must be distinctively social-performative.<sup>459</sup>

As well as communicating a meaning, these toast prayers, as we have seen above, are also 'doing' something in the social realm. Anthropologists have long recognised that the effectiveness of ritual is as much reliant on their being enacted or performed as on the semantic message that they communicate and that it is through being part of or witnessing ritual performance that believers, in the words of Schieffelin, can 'see symbolic representations as external and having a force of their own'.<sup>460</sup> For Connerton these performances establish and maintain social memory and with it social cohesion, but they are also, in the case of toast-prayers, an act before *Allah* that operates in relation to the additional cosmological register of transcendent reality and divine power. The relations 'within' the performance between the toast-giver, the gathered company and *Allah* therefore deserve our closer attention. What follows is an analysis of the mechanics, in terms of speech act theory introduced at the beginning of this thesis, of the toast-prayers introduced above.

Hungarian folklorist Irén Lovász, following Searle's system of classification of performative or 'illocutionary' acts, identifies the basic form of prayer as 'request'.<sup>461</sup> In the paragraphs that follow we will follow Lovász's train of thought with regard to prayers as a performance of 'request', whilst referring directly to both Austin's and Searle's theories of performative speech acts.<sup>462</sup> An important element of the speech act theory is concerned with the consequences and effects speech acts have on the hearers in terms of their subsequent actions, thoughts and beliefs; this is what Austin refers to as the 'perlocutionary' act, the ability to persuade.<sup>463</sup> There is an important distinction between the 'illocutionary' act, which is the actual act performed in saying an utterance and the

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<sup>459</sup> Connerton, *How Societies Remember*, p. 35.

<sup>460</sup> Schieffelin, 'Performance', p. 708.

<sup>461</sup> Lovász, *Szakrális Kommunikáció*, pp. 42-48.

<sup>462</sup> Here I rely primarily on the following works: Austin, 'How to do things', 1962, J. Searle, *Speech Acts: An Essay on the Philosophy of Language*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969 and J. Searle and D. Vanderveken, *Foundations of Illocutionary Logic*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985.

<sup>463</sup> Searle, *Speech Acts*, p. 25.

'perlocutionary' act which 'gets something done' through the act of saying it. Benjamin Ray offers the useful example: 'by saying "close the door," I perform the act of giving an order', which is the 'illocutionary' aspect, and also 'by saying "close the door," I may get someone to do it', which is the 'perlocutionary' aspect.<sup>464</sup> In both cases there is an effect and it is the 'effect' of 'what is done' in the toast-prayers that we should seek to understand in order to grasp their significance with regard to lay agency and authority. The cosmological and ontological frames within which the toast-prayers are encased are exhibited in the dynamics of the speech acts, through which we have a means of describing the structures that determine agency in 'performance'.

With regard to illocutionary 'requests' Searle asserts that there are certain basic conditions that need to be fulfilled. They are explained in the following terms: H (the hearer) is able to do A (the act), S (the speaker) believes that H is able to do A, and also that it is not obvious to both S and H that H will do A in the normal course of events of his own accord (S needs to request A to be sure it will take place).<sup>465</sup> There are certain additional conditions that can transform a 'request' into an 'order' or 'command'. However, Lovasz makes the observation that in the case of 'requests' made in the context of prayer S (the speaker, in our case the person giving the toast, is in an inferior/subordinate position in relation to H (the hearer) and turns to H with humility or submissively. This relationship can be said to transform the nature of the simple 'request' to that of 'supplication' or 'entreaty' in which the question of power and authority need to be taken into consideration.<sup>466</sup>

Understanding this primary set of relations between the speaker and the hearer is vital when we consider the role of the rest of the company in Gagauz toast-prayer. As we saw above the prescribed response from everyone present is to reiterate in chorus the initial request made by the speaker with the words *Allah versin!*, May God grant it!. The pattern that then unfolds conforms to Searle's modal of an 'assertion, statement or affirmation': C (the company, who now take the role of the speaker) have evidence for the truth (or in this case the validity or felicitousness) of P (the proposition, ie. that H, the hearer, *Allah*,

<sup>464</sup> B. Ray, "Performative Utterances" in African Rituals', *History of Religions*, 13 (1973), p. 18.

<sup>465</sup> Ibid., pp. 66-67.

<sup>466</sup> Lovász, *Szakrális Kommunikáció*, p. 44. Searle offers an example of the reverse situation when S has a position of power or authority over H, thus transforming a request into an 'order' or 'command'. See Searle, *Speech Acts*, pp. 66-67.

should perform A). It is not obvious to both C and H that H knows (does not need to be reminded of) P. (the proposition). To this Searle also adds the condition of sincerity, that S believes the truth of P. In our case C (the company) is affirming the justness or validity of P as a communal wish or 'project' rather than its actuality. However, the role of affirmation of P before H remains the same.

At this stage we can summarise by saying that, based on the speech acts and the relations between the actors we have just described, the speaker makes a request or wish before *Allah* and the company that is based on mutually acceptable and desirable outcomes; these are then affirmed before *Allah* by everyone gathered. It is at this stage that we must ask some more probing questions in regard to *Allah*'s role in the proceedings.

Lovász, in her study of Hungarian traditional prayer, offers examples of the kind of speech act that according to traditional categorizations of prayer would be referred to as blessings or benedictions, and their antithesis, curses or maledictions, as a means of demonstrating the role of God in relation to the human actors in this kind of scenario. Based on the modal developed by Pócs to which we referred in chapter five (see page 154) she cites a simple example of a Hungarian blessing, *Isten áldjon meg!*, equivalent to the common 'God bless you!' in English; and a curse, *Isten verjen meg!*, which carries the meaning 'May God strike you down!'. These examples are linguistically comparable constructions with our standard response in the Gagauz toast-prayers of *Allah versin!* In such cases the perceived relationship between A (the speaker), who instead of asking C (the divine or spiritual agent) to influence B (the person or thing to be influenced) instead merely refers to C in their direct intervention with B. This A (C) → B model she categorises as a magico-religious (*vallásos magikus*) formula in contrast to an A → B (magical modal), where A attempts to directly influence B, or an A → C → B (religious modal), where A requests C to influence B.<sup>467</sup> The basic distinction being made here is between a 'request' made of divine power and a magical act performed in the presence of or referring to divine power. This kind of schema of course accepts the basic *a priori* relationship between magic and religion that place them at opposing poles. It then attempts to bridge the two extremes by use of a third category, that of 'magico-religious'. However, this kind of manoeuvre still enters the discourse on what 'truly' constitutes prayer and what does not. As we saw in the previous chapter, categorisations based on distinctions drawn

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<sup>467</sup> Lovász, *Szakrális Kommunikáció*, p. 44.

with reference to the discursive or propositional content of speech acts, such as we have discussed under the terms *dua*, *okumak*, and *molitva*, ignore the contextual nature of such speech acts. The function or role of these various forms of speech act, which ultimately is the criteria on which the culture-bearers themselves ascribe labels to the 'texts' they perform, is determined by the context and it is the performance of the 'text', which effects the social reality, regardless of the ontological status of divine beings and the reality of their interventions.

Analytical modals such as those proposed by Pócs and Lovász still rely on a qualitative distinction regarding the ontological status of C (a divine or spiritual being) and C's inability to actually intervene at the request of A, because if C can intervene, as A genuinely believes, and is willing to intervene, then C's status as a divine or spiritual being becomes irrelevant as C should be treated with the same status as any human interlocutor that is genuinely able and willing to intervene in a given situation. Following this train of thought the carefully constructed set of relationships between 'prayer', 'incantation' and 'curse/blessing' become at best irrelevant and at worst divisive in their maintenance of theologically determined religious value systems.

This kind of pragmatic linguistic analysis offers us a way of viewing relations, established through speech acts, between 'objectively ontological' humans and 'subjectively ontological' divine or spiritual actors, without making ontological judgements with regard to the actual 'social reality', or 'cosmological reality' of such actors.<sup>468</sup> The implications for how we see Gagauz toast-prayers are twofold. Firstly, the 'performance' of the toast-prayer establishes the relations between the community and *Allah* as that of the 'requester' and the 'requested of', with distinctions regarding direct requests or direct interventions with reference to the divine being rendered, in practical terms, irrelevant by the nature of 'performance' itself as both the act that 'does' the 'request' and the act that may also 'get someone to do the act'. In any event, in a 'pragmatic' sense, the performance has happened and *Allah* has been addressed. Secondly, the corporate nature of the authority of the toast-prayer has been established. The company has confirmed the validity of the request to *Allah* and in so doing reaffirmed the broader

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<sup>468</sup> The distinction between 'objectively ontological' and 'subjectively ontological' is taken from Searle and refers to the reliance of 'objectively ontological' entities on 'brute facts' whereas the 'subjectively ontological' entities rely on the intentionality that comes with human consciousness. Searle, *The Construction of Social Reality*, p. 1-29.

cosmological 'thought/belief' structures' that locate *Allah* in relation to existential phenomena such as rain, war and health and the community. This relationship is affirmed within the context of wine drinking, which, as we discussed, carries powerful cultural and religious capital. For this set of relations to change would require a new or 'contradictory', to use Althusser's term, 'ideological' input that would alter the internalised structures that determine the position and agency of those praying. This input would, it can be argued, in the first place appear in the 'context' of *dua* toast-prayers, and would only later influence both the social 'function' and the 'text' of the toast-prayer performance.

This kind of social performance of prayer maintains, though practice, the institutional relationship with divine agency. At the same time it is a traditionalising force that affirms the social and cosmological order of things. In this context the agent appears to be 'subjected' to 'unconscious' tradition and confined to the meanings and structures that it permits. However, once again, we can observe the centrality of language and speech acts to this process and how the agency of language is contingent on contextual factors. That is to say, the role and effect of speech acts are determined by the context of their performance and not by categorisations and the dualities present in discursive intent of texts and any truth claims they may contain. As Gavin Flood points out it is in performance that transmission of texts takes place and to the processes of cultural replication and identification that we should turn our attention when enquiring into religious phenomena.<sup>469</sup>

Having looked in some depth at the 'performative' nature of toast-prayer, the social or 'public' nature of which allows them to be readily approached methodologically from a social 'performance' perspective, in the following chapter we shall introduce another form of prayer, the context and performance of which, are quite markedly different from toast-prayers. The following examples of prayer are essentially private and 'domestic' in nature, textually 'fixed', and primarily performed by women, all of which contrasts sharply with the very public and male form of religious expression of the toast-prayers.

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<sup>469</sup> Flood, *Beyond Phenomenology*, p. 177.

## Chapter 7.

Kim söylecek bu molitvayı onu ii sözleyecek dedi Allah - 'And Allah said whosoever says this prayer will be well blessed': Archaic Passion Prayers amongst the Gagauz

The genre of 'archaic' or 'apocryphal' prayer, also often referred to as 'folk' prayer, which is addressed in this chapter, has received little attention from academics, especially outside Central and Eastern Europe. In the late 19<sup>th</sup> century a handful of Italian, German and Russian scholars began to investigate the origins of the oral apocryphal legends and songs, which lie at the core of this tradition of prayer and in more recent years Hungarian, Slovenian and Polish scholars have also contributed to this field of study.<sup>470</sup> Due perhaps to the widespread nature of this tradition amongst Hungarian speakers, this genre has received more attention from academics in Hungary and Hungarian speaking academics in the neighbouring countries than in any other region. Hungarian scholarship especially has contributed to the study of the late medieval origins of this tradition, to research on the symbolism and imagery of the prayers, as well as the sociological and ethnological dimensions of their use.<sup>471</sup>

The Gagauz tradition of 'archaic' prayer bears much resemblance to that of the neighbouring Russians, Romanians and Hungarians. However, unlike the case with these larger nations, until the present day the Gagauz tradition has not received any attention from local scholars dealing with folklore or folk religion.<sup>472</sup> Therefore, due to the scarcity of sources relating specifically to the Gagauz tradition much of the secondary historical, ethnographic, and folkloric observations to which we shall refer in this chapter are of

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<sup>470</sup> Erdélyi gives a brief summary of the most significant contributors to the field in Zs. Erdélyi, '*Aki ezt az imádságot...*', Pozsony: Kalligram, 2001, p. 22 and 30.

<sup>471</sup> On the origins of 'archaic prayer' see particularly Zs. Erdélyi, *Heget Hágék, Lőtőt Lépék: Archaikus Népi Imádságok*, Pozsony: Kalligram, 1999, p. 38-60 and Erdélyi, '*Aki ezt az imádságot...*'. On the origins of the Dream of the Mother of God specifically see Gy. Orosz, '„Csódálatos álmot láttam...“, A „Legszentebb Istenszülő álma“ című nagyorosz egzházi népénekekről', in E. Pócs (ed.), *Extázis, Álom, Látomás*, Budapest, 1998, pp. 422-453. With regard to the symbolism and images of this form of prayer see V. Tánzos, *Eleven osztya szép virág: A moldvai csángó népi imák képei*, Csíkszereda: Krónika, 2000. Tánzos also examines some of the sociological and anthropological issues relating to the practice of prayer amongst the Hungarians of Moldavia in V. Tánzos, *Csapdosó angyal: Moldvai archaikus imádságok és életterük*, Csíkszereda: Krónika, 1999.

<sup>472</sup> The only exception to this being the authors own brief article, which introduces the genre and presents some examples of prayers collected between 2004 and 2006. See J. Kapaló, 'Molitva i zaklinaniya v religioznom folklore gagauzov', in *Istoria i Kultura Gagauzov*, Komrat-Kishinev: Pontus, 2006, pp. 477-486.



Russian, Hungarian or Romanian origin. In such circumstances comparative remarks are unavoidable but these shall be kept to a minimum.

As with the other forms of 'text' we have explored thus far, when understanding the text 'in practice' our analysis must address both prayer as communication, that is the implications of the discursive or propositional message that is intended for the hearer or for the performer herself, and the performance of the 'text' with its accompanying 'performative' force. What these two aspects of the prayer acts 'do', as we saw in previous chapters, is fully contingent on context. Before we go on to look at the Gagauz 'archaic' prayer texts themselves, their context, and their performance, we should say a few words about the 'construction' of the genre of 'archaic prayer' by ethnographers and folklorists and the tradition of scholarship within which this form of prayer is located. As already stated, Hungarian scholarship has done most to establish 'archaic' prayer as an object of study and a brief outline of the factors in the articulation of the new genre of 'archaic prayer' in Hungary may be instructive at this point.

### 7.1 The Contours of the Genre of 'Archaic Prayer'

As with the other dimensions of religious practice that we have approached in this study, traditional scholarship has described and defined 'archaic prayer' on a 'textual' basis and set this tradition up in binary opposition to the official or canonical norm of theological and academic discourse. In this way, the definition of the 'idiosyncratic' or 'deviant' type of prayer, in relation to the ideal type prayer, encompasses a whole range of binary positions, such as canon and apocrypha, prayer and incantation, orthodox and heterodox, that constitute and construct the discourse that has evolved around these inherited 'texts'.

In the context of Hungarian scholarship, the definition of the genre of 'archaic prayer' and its establishment within the broader framework in folklore studies was accomplished by ethnographer Zsuzsanna Erdélyi. Several examples of this kind of prayer had appeared in earlier studies of religious folklore, most notably those by the Russians Bessonov and Veselovskii and the Romanian Simion Florea Marian. In these collections they had been included alongside the established genres of religious legends, hymns, carols

and incantations and were subjected to the same kind of textual analysis.<sup>473</sup> There were also some scattered examples and references in earlier Hungarian scholarship but it was not until 1968 when Erdélyi began her systematic collection and study of what had been this virtually unknown oral tradition and her subsequent presentation of findings to the Hungarian Academy, which accepted her definition of the new category in February 1970, that we can really speak of the establishment or the 'institutionalisation' of the genre of 'archaic apocryphal prayer', at least in Hungary.<sup>474</sup>

This form of prayer was ascribed the labels 'archaic' and 'apocryphal' for several reasons. The term 'archaic' relates to the many elements that appear in the prayers that, according to Erdélyi, have their origins in the popular devotional literature from the 13<sup>th</sup> to the 15<sup>th</sup> century. The Marian laments, Passion Plays, Marian prayers and meditations on the Passion of Christ in the *Horae* literature of medieval Christianity, much of which was also a vehicle for the emerging national 'vulgar' literatures of the period, all left their mark on the folklorised texts that are found in the oral traditions of prayer of many European peoples.<sup>475</sup> This 'vibrant' spirituality that evolved due to the influence of Saint Francis of Assisi and others gradually enveloped the whole of Europe, not only the Catholic West but, via Poland and Lithuania, the Orthodox East too.<sup>476</sup> Many of these modes of devotional practice, which centred on atonement through the inner experience of the Passion of Christ and profound suffering of the Virgin Mary at the loss of her son, waned in later centuries giving them the character of 'archaisms' in relation to more recent or contemporary forms of prayer or worship, the implication being that these 'archaic' forms are now obsolete, redundant and have their origins in spiritually 'corrupt' times.

<sup>473</sup> See Bezsonov, P., *Kaleki perekhozhie: Sbornik stikhov i isledovanie (Itinerant cripples. A collection of verses and a study.)*, Vol. 1 & 2, England: Gregg International Publishers, 1970, Veselovskii, A. N., *Opyty po istorii razvitiya khristianskoi legendy, Zhurnal Ministertva narodnogo prosveshcheniya*, 3 (1876), pp. 326-367. Marian, S. F., *Legendele Maicii Domnului, Studiu Folkloric*, Bucureşti: Editiune Academiei Române, 1904. The earliest published Hungarian examples appeared 1891, see L. Kálmány, *Szeged népe III: Szeged vidéke népköltése*, Szeged, 1891.

<sup>474</sup> Zs. Erdélyi, *Heget Hágék, Lőtőt Lépek: Archaikus Népi Imádságok*, Pozsony: Kalligram, 1999, p. 18.

<sup>475</sup> Erdélyi, 'Aki ezt az imádságot', 2001, p. 12.

<sup>476</sup> The exact origins, route and mode of transmission of this particular expression of spirituality between Catholic West and Orthodox East have been the source of some debate. Most scholarship dealing with this issue has centred on The Dream of the Mother of God, or the *Panaiyan dişü* of the Gagauz. Various theories have sought to explain the widespread nature of this tradition through reference to the wandering *Flagelanti*, the penitent brotherhoods of the 13th century and the later *Laudesi* confraternities of the 13th-14th century. For a brief summary of these debates see Gy. Orosz, *Nagyorosz egzházi népének a mágikus praktikákban: A „Legszentebb Istenszüldő álma”*, Bessenyei György Tanárképző Főiskola Tudományos Közleményei 13/E, Nyíregyháza: Bessenyei György Könyvkiadó, 1992, pp. 171-172.

Alongside these so-called 'archaic' elements some of the most popular and enduring images from the apocryphal literature of the Middle Ages also appear in these prayers. In the examples that follow we shall meet some of the most common of these; the Marian 'dream' and 'search' motifs, and the symbolism of the 'Holy Grail'. The juxtaposition of diverse elements from various historical strata and devotional traditions, which when subjected to 'textual' readings has had the effect of 'confusing' the folklorist with regard to their original 'function', as well as the process of 'folklorisation' in oral transmission, has rendered this form of prayer, at least in the eyes of the Church, 'theologically and liturgically absurd'.<sup>477</sup> These factors account for this form of prayer's second appellation of 'apocryphal'.

However, in addition to the 'official' titular labels attached to the genre many scholars also employ the term 'folk prayer', for example in Hungarian *népi ima* or in Slovenian *lydske molitve*, which has the effect of aligning the tradition more closely to the field of folklore, oral tradition and the domain of the folklorist, who for the most part are the people engaged in the study of this form of prayer.<sup>478</sup> Designating such prayers as 'folk' manifestations has a dual effect, as we noted in the introduction to this thesis, of both 'denigrating' a suspect manifestation of popular religion in relation to true religious phenomena, and 'elevating' this same manifestation to the status of symbolic representation of the genius of the ethnos or nation.

In addition to the factors mentioned above the genre betrays many common textual elements with the kind of charms and incantations we explored in chapter 3. Indeed, Lovász goes as far as to suggest that some of these prayers should be regarded as 'magical prayers' and much of the literature speaks of them as 'mixed' or 'syncretic'.<sup>479</sup> Such a conclusion is derived from both textual readings, Tánzos for example refers to the primacy of 'magical coercive motifs' over those that are based on petition or supplication,<sup>480</sup> as well as contextual ones. Erdélyi refers to the fact that in 'folk consciousness' healing incantations, 'archaic' and canonical prayers are not parcelled into separate categories but are employed in 'real life' situations as and when required

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<sup>477</sup> Erdélyi, 'Aki ezt az imádságot...', 2001, p. 33.

<sup>478</sup> In the authors introductory article to Gagauz 'archaic-apocryphal prayer' of the Russian term *narodnaya molitva* or 'folk prayer' is employed. Kapaló, 'Molitva i zaklinaniya', pp. 477-486.

<sup>479</sup> Lovász, *Szakrális Kommunikáció*, p. 44.

<sup>480</sup> Tánzos, *Csapdosó angyal*, p. 253.

regardless of the function that we read from the text.<sup>481</sup> However, as Tánzos states, both text and context also demonstrate that alongside any concrete goals this tradition is also 'embedded in the universal, long-term religious perspective' of the Christian believer.<sup>482</sup> This tendency to equate the practical existential concerns with 'magic' and the 'folk consciousness' and universal transcendental concerns with 'religion' sets up dichotomies in the cosmological 'order' that are constructed and reinforced by the authority of scholarly discourse. The implications of reading tensions between the 'coercive' and the 'petitional' or between the 'concrete existential' and the universal and transcendent will become clear as we introduce the Gagauz prayer texts and their functional context below.

The Hungarian literature especially has imprinted on the 'genre' a set of associations including magical, apocryphal, 'liturgically absurd', and 'syncretic' that are mirrored throughout the broader literature on 'folk religion'. An understanding of the burden of the scholarly language that surrounds this mode of prayer is necessary if we are to approach the contextual and performative dimensions of the practice of these prayers as 'constitutive of' rather than 'supplementary to' Gagauz religious practice. As we established at the very beginning of this study, essentialist discourses of Christianity, based on historical, doctrinal, and textual evidence, can have the result of excluding whole dimensions of people's religious lives, or of viewing them merely as an enactment of pre-existing and pre-determined beliefs. More than this, the association with the 'genius' of the nation and of the national language that is implicit in the term 'folk' has also had the effect of surrounding this form of prayer with a 'mystical' quality that is linked to ethnic and national specificity, in Hungarian and Romanian scholarship certainly, which in turn persuades the observer of the parochial and ethno-specific nature of these traditions. These tendencies inevitably impinge on discussions of Gagauz prayer culture and the place of this mode of prayer within it. In other words aspects of culture that are designated 'folk' must belong to a specific 'folk', and reflect the 'essence' of that 'folk' back to the wider nation in order for them to be considered legitimate representations of their unique 'folk' consciousness. In the discussion that follows we shall see how this complex set of ascriptions to the 'text' of prayers not only de-legitimises the practice of these prayers on

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<sup>481</sup> Erdélyi, *Heget Hágék*, pp. 798-800.

<sup>482</sup> Tánzos, *Csapdosó angyal*, p. 252.

doctrinal religious grounds but also very easily can 'ethnically' invalidate objects from 'folk' discourse on the basis of origins, recent provenance, or language.

It goes without saying at this point that none of the terms described above are employed by ordinary Gagauz believers, or their Hungarian or Romanian counterparts, to refer to the prayers they perform. They exist within a cultural, literary and religious milieu that, despite their 'objective' particularity, from the perspective of the academic world, has afforded them anonymity and allowed them to remain 'nameless' and beyond remark. One Hungarian commentator referred to this form of prayer as representing a '*spiritualia incognita*'.<sup>483</sup> With regards to the Gagauz tradition there are two aspects to this tendency, which we shall explore more fully later, but they relate to the necessity for secrecy due to clerical sanction and the desire to maintain secrecy in order to protect or maintain the power of certain prayers; this is something we encountered earlier with regard to the *okumak* of village healers. The methodological problems that we highlighted at the beginning of this chapter with regard to 'observing' and representing 'private' prayer are of course exacerbated by issues such as secrecy and the covert nature of this tradition.

The conclusions that Erdélyi and others reached regarding the medieval and apocryphal legacy at the core of 'archaic' folk prayer traditions of other Central and Eastern European peoples also holds true of the Gagauz tradition. Gagauz prayers share common forms, motifs, structure and imagery with those of the neighbouring peoples, most especially those found amongst Romanians.<sup>484</sup> Although it is not our intent here to enter into the debates on the historical origins of this form of prayer, or even to allocate them a particular place in the historical continuum of Gagauz religiosity, a familiarity with the form and discursive content of these prayers will be essential in our analysis of the practice of prayer that follows.

The form that these prayers have taken has a historical theological explanation, as we shall see shortly, that also accounts for how the prayers can be considered to 'operate' on the believer in 'spiritual' and 'redemptive' terms. This explanation is reliant, first and foremost, on the propositional content of these prayers. Of the two decisive elements we encounter, one is largely canonical whilst the other is decidedly non-canonical, in terms of

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<sup>483</sup> Erdélyi, *Heget Hágék*, p. 13.

<sup>484</sup> Many similarities are observable with the four Romanian prayers published in Erdélyi, '*Aki ezt az imádságot...*', 2001, pp. 243-252.

both Orthodox and Catholic doctrine. However, alongside this form of textual explanation we seek to demonstrate how the prayers, through their performance and transmission, contribute to the construction of the Gagauz celestial and terrestrial cosmological realities that we began to elaborate in the previous chapter and how the relations established with divine agents through prayer operate in the institutional setting of 'archaic' prayer.

Due to the methodological problems outlined at the beginning of the previous chapter relating to the 'interior' and private dimensions of prayer (see pages 199-200), we are to a large extent reliant on the propositional dimension of these key elements of the prayers, the key factor in our interpretation being the acknowledgement of their transformation from 'silent' page or memory to 'utterance in performance'. The context of performance, even the methodologically compromised or artificial performances discussed below, gives us clues as to the contribution, significance and particularity of this form of prayer to Gagauz religious life. Observing how these core textual elements operate in performance gives us some insight into the generation of social religious 'facts', the cosmological reality of divine and human relations, and how these relations operate to achieve this-worldly and other-worldly aims. In other words, the words on the page and the words uttered may appear objectively the same but the mode of interpretation and medium of transmission may allow them to say more than either the naked text betrays or the theologian has traditionally been equipped or inclined to recognise.

The following examples of Gagauz 'archaic' folk prayers illustrate well the textual characteristics of the genre and introduce some of the most typical elements and formulas that give the genre its distinctive character. These are the building blocks of the construction of both scholarly exegesis of the text of 'archaic' prayers and of the lived experience of the performance.

## 7.2 Textual Motifs and Formulae

The first example below was collected in the village of *Beşalma* and opens with a brief 'statement of faith', which is untypical at least in regard to Gagauz folk prayers. The seeming confusion over the precise identity and role of the various celestial beings in these opening lines is most probably the result of distortions and confusions that occurred during

oral transmission of the text rather than a reflection of a heterodox theological perspective with regard to the nature of the Godhead.<sup>485</sup>

I hope there is a God in the sky,  
We have a saviour Jesus Christ in the sky,  
Our creator the Mother of God in the sky.  
Three small branches, God, Son and Holy Ghost.  
I have a creator, the Mother of God in the sky,  
My dear Friday bent over on her knees,  
Prays for us,  
- Nobody sees, nobody hears,  
Only the three sisters of Lazar  
See and hear.  
One is Marta, one is Mary, and one is Magdolna,  
They wandered in the mountains,  
Picking flowers to decorate heaven,  
Candles and stars came alight, heaven opened.  
Dear Friday stood up and said,  
- Whoever shall know and say this prayer of mine,  
On Thursday in the evening five times,  
On Friday in the morning six times,  
For them an angel will come and carry them to rest,  
On the honey wax throne, to Abraham's,  
Isaacs' and Jacob's bosom,  
Amen.

(Çakir Elena, village of Beşalma, recorded two occasions on 08.06.04 and 24.04.06, see Appendix 4, text 1)

Following the introductory, lines we come to the central body of the prayer in which we are introduced to the main protagonist of the prayer, the celestial being with whom the person praying engages directly. This divine or holy personage, who as we shall see in further examples may be one of a number of saints or angels, routinely takes on the role of intercessor before God and also is often a direct witness to the Passion of Christ and/or the sufferings of the Mother of God. In the example above it is *Sevgim Cuma* or Dear Friday, who may represent either the personified form of the Greek martyr St. Paraskeva, who also later assimilated the figure of *Piatnica* or Friday Woman of Russian folklore and who herself may be connected with the chief pagan goddess of the Slavs *Mokosh*, or indeed the

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<sup>485</sup> Of the Gagauz language texts in the author's collection this particular example shows the most sign of the kind of distortion and incertitude that result from oral transmission over generations. Other Gagauz folk prayers seem to have been transmitted primarily via *tetradkas* and show less signs of degradation of meaning. Theologically and scripturally speaking they make more sense.

Mother of God herself, also connected with both the cult of *Piatnica* and the figure of *Mokosh*.<sup>486</sup> Here *Cumaa* is portrayed as intercessor before God but also as witness to the activities of 'Marta, Maria and Magdalena' referred to as 'the three sisters of Lazar'. The occurrence of this kind 'inaccuracy' with regard to the biblical sources is quite common in 'archaic' folk prayer and is one of the reasons why historically they have attracted the scorn of the Church.<sup>487</sup> But the connection here with Friday does not just relate to the personified figure of *Cumaa* but also relates to the Friday of the Passion and the Crucifixion. It seems clear that the lines 'nobody sees, nobody hears, only the three sisters of Lazar see and hear, one is Marta, one is Mary, and one is Magdolna' refer to the events surrounding the resurrection recounted in the Gospels.<sup>488</sup> This conclusion is supported by a Romanian text published by Erdélyi that has a very similar formula, 'Nobody in the world heard, nobody in the world saw, only Mary Magdalene, the sister of Lazar, the wife of Abraham', that follows immediately after an account of the crucifixion.<sup>489</sup> However, we also met this formula '*hiç kimsey görmedi, hiç kimsey isitmedi*' in the context of healing *okumak* where it is *Panaiya* that is the only witness to the suffering of the sick. In this sense the frame within which the compassion for the suffering of the sick is presented is mirrored in the 'witness' scenes from the prayers. The figure of the 'witness' seems to represent, in both cases, the power of the secret or hidden aspect of knowledge. This knowledge is held and channelled by the person praying or conducting the healing ritual who has become privy to the experiential knowledge associated with these women who were connected to Jesus and his crucifixion.

It is the relation to the events of the Passion and Resurrection, to which both the divine messenger and the person praying are witness in 'archaic' prayers and which is only

<sup>486</sup> For a full discussion of the origins of the personified form of Friday see Gy. Orosz, *Egi levelek: Isten és a papok üzenete*, Nyíregyháza: Bessenyei György Könyvkiadó, 1997, pp. 14-15. The figure of *Piatnica* has also been connected with the Russian 'Cult of the 12 Fridays', which we briefly mentioned in chapter 2 as featuring amongst the apocryphal texts found in Gagauz *tetradkas*. However, according to Orosz, this is just speculation that overlooks much more compelling evidence that points to the origins of the cult in the text 'Sage of the 12 Fridays' that has been attributed to the Roman Pope Clement V. The tradition based on this text, that also takes the form of a prayer, is 'rooted in a Roman Catholic religious-cultural background', according to Orosz, and has nothing to do with the Russian figure of *Piatnica*. See *ibid.*, pp. 14-28 and Gy. Orosz, 'And these are the Fridays, Apocrypha, Church Folksongs' in E. Jónás (ed.) *Nyelvek és Kultúrák Között: Jubileumi tanulmánykötet Viktor Alekszandrovics Fedoszov tiszteletére*, Nyíregyháza: Krúdy Könyvkiadó, 2007, pp. 119-124.

<sup>487</sup> Two Romanian prayers published by Erdélyi similarly confuse the identity of biblical characters by referring to Maria Magdalena as Lazar's sister. See Erdélyi, *Aki ezt az imádságot*, p. 243 and p. 246.

<sup>488</sup> Mark 6:1-12, Matthew 28:1-10, Luke 24:1-12, and John 20:1-18.

<sup>489</sup> Erdélyi, *Aki ezt az imádságot*, p. 246.



inferred in the truncated example above, but which is far more explicit in the following example, that give this 'genre' of prayer one of its central and most distinctive 'textual' characteristics.

The Lord went to Jerusalem  
To God's house, on the veranda  
He prayed, the Holy Angel  
Came down to earth. Jesus Christ  
they tortured, hung him  
from a cross, his feet  
and hands they nailed  
from thorns a crown they wove  
and placed it on his head, they shed  
his blood, but the blood wasn't used.  
The Holy Angel under a golden cup  
he placed, to flows, to drip,  
Collect, but not to spoil.  
Whoever will know this prayer  
in fire will not be burned,  
in water will not  
Be drowned.  
For ever and ever,  
Amen.<sup>490</sup>

(Radiş Vasilisa Vasilevna, village of *Kazayak*, see Appendix 4,  
text 2)

Following the introductory lines to this prayer, which as in our previous example set the scene and introduced the heavenly messenger in the role of intercessor, in this instance *Ayoz Angel*, the Holy Angel, we enter straight into an account of the details of the Passion and crucifixion. As we remarked above, the 'archaic' origins of this form of prayer are considered by Erdélyi to have their roots in the spirituality that arose in the age of Saint Francis of Assisi (1181-1226). An enhanced more fervent devotion to the crucified Christ, as opposed to the figure of Christ in majesty, was one of the hallmarks of Catholicism from the late 12<sup>th</sup> century onwards and there are countless examples of how this emergent form of piety entered the devotional practice of believers.<sup>491</sup> During this period the crucifix and

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<sup>490</sup> This prayer was copied from the *tetradka* of Radiş Vasilisa Vasilevna of the village of *Kazayak*. The lines and punctuation appear here as in the original Gagauz text. This prayer represents the second most common example of 'archaic' prayer, after *Panaiyan dişii*, to be found amongst the Gagauz. In addition to the variant printed above I collected oral examples in the villages of *Avdarma*, *Kazayak* and *Beşgöz*.

<sup>491</sup> S. Ferenc, 'A Szenvedésmisztika és az archaikus imádságok', in J. Czövek (ed.) *Imádságos Asszony: Erdélyi Zsuzsanna Köszöntése*, Budapest: Gondolat Kiadói kör - Európai Folklór Intézet, 2003, p. 135.

images of the suffering Crucified Christ take a more prominent place in Churches, replacing the figure of Christ Pantocrator that adorned church buildings up to that point and that are still characteristic of Orthodox Churches. The 'Little Offices of the Cross' and 'De Passione' of the *Horæ* books, the 'Way of the Cross' and Passion Plays, each in its own way a meditation or contemplation on the Suffering Christ, are all characteristic of this time. Although the devotional literature and the new form of visual iconography of the period left little trace on the canonical prayer of the Catholic Church, it strongly influenced the oral traditions that were later to emerge as traditions of 'archaic' prayer. Eamon Duffy, speaking about religious culture in the late medieval period, talks about a 'homogeneity across the social spectrum, a shared repertoire of symbols, prayers, and beliefs which crossed and bridge even the gulf between the literate and the illiterate', which would certainly allow for the new modes of religious devotion evolving in the monasteries and amongst the elites to enter the oral traditions of lay believers.<sup>492</sup> What Erdélyi terms the 'verbal iconography' of 'archaic' prayer is almost ubiquitously centred on the Passion giving them both their characteristic narrative structure and their primary religious 'function'.<sup>493</sup> Gagauz religious folksong is also rich in similar naturalistic portrayals of the Passion narrative, which almost certainly are sourced from the same devotional traditions.<sup>494</sup>

The historical theological precedent for this form of enactment or meditation on the mystery of the Passion in prayer that we meet in classic examples of 'archaic prayer' has been traced by Ferenc Szabó through a whole series of scriptural, patristic and medieval examples. Referring to the 11th century monk St. Bernard of Clairvaux he states that 'contemplation on Christ's suffering, the imitation of the Crucified Christ, leads to the intimate union in love with the Word made Flesh'. With Saint Francis of Assisi this is taken to conclusion with his vision before the icon of Christ Crucified and his assimilation of the Suffering of Christ realised in the marks of the stigmata during his fast during the Feast of the Exaltation of the Cross.<sup>495</sup> The various psychological, emotional and physical forms of devotion for experiencing and identifying with the suffering of Christ continued

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<sup>492</sup> Duffy, *Stripping*, p. 3.

<sup>493</sup> V. Tanczos, *Eleven Osztya Szép Virág*, Csíkszereda: Pro-Print, 2000, p. 241.

<sup>494</sup> In the village of *Kazayak* religious folksongs of this kind have been incorporated into the liturgy and are sung by the congregation during communion.

<sup>495</sup> Ferenc, 'A Szenvedésmisztika', p. 136.

to emerge through the rise of *devotio moderna* and the *imitatio Christi* of Thomas a Kempis and on into the 16th century in the mystical thought of St. John of the Cross and St. Teresa of Ávila.

The example set by a whole array of the beatified of the Catholic Church that through meditations on and devotion to the suffering Christ one might achieve personal salvation is of course dependent on the orthodox theological understanding that through Christ's suffering and sacrifice for this world death itself can be overcome. The central mystery of the Incarnation and Resurrection, which is *the* decisive historical occurrence that enables this to happen, becomes, through the acts of devotion described above, an *eternally* reenacted cosmic act offering every believer the possibility of sharing in the suffering of Christ throughout their life so that in death they may achieve salvation from both suffering and death.

In all the examples that follow we can find the same kind of naturalistic almost gruesome accounts of the Crucifixion as seen above. It is because of their intimate connection with the events of the Passion that these prayers, often referred to in Moldavian Hungarian tradition for this reason as Friday prayers, are considered to be especially powerful.

The ethnographic literature has had much to say about the fact that the secret of the particular power of the 'Friday' prayers in which the Passion of Christ is recounted is magical in character seeing that every form of *imitatio Christi* – for example performing the stations of the cross, self-flagellation and in our case the verbal evocation and reliving of the Passion – has a coercive effect: the person praying receives grace before God.<sup>496</sup>

This notion of coercion will be picked up later when we look at the closing formula of archaic prayers but the conclusion that this type of prayer is particularly powerful in some way is certainly reflected in the Gagauz tradition that surrounds *Panaiyan düşü*, 'The Dream of the Mother of God' and its use at the time of serious illness and death. In previous chapters we mentioned this particular text with regard to its appearance amongst the *tetradka* translations alongside the *epistoliyas* (see pages 116-118), and also with reference to priestly injunctions against the use of this prayer (see pages 128-129).

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<sup>496</sup> Tánzos, *Csapdosó Angyal*, p. 255.

The historical, artistic and theological precedents for a form of prayer centred on the figure *Vir Dolorum*, the Suffering Christ or Man of Sorrows, and Christ Crucified also produced the figure of *Mater Dolorosa*, the sorrowful mother who contemplates in anguish the suffering of her son on the Cross. The medieval Marian laments, perhaps the most well known of which is the 13th century poem *Stabat Mater Dolorosa*, have been connected by Vesilovskii with the origins of the 'Dream of the Mother of God', as have the medieval tales of *Dormitione Mariae*, the 'Dormition of the Virgin Mary'.<sup>497</sup> The characteristic elements of 'The Dream of the Mother of God', the dream sequence in which Mary has a premonitory vision of what will befall her Son in Jerusalem, the conversation between Mary and Jesus followed by her description of the torments she sees in her dream are each clearly present in the following Gagauz variant of *Panaiyan düşü* from the village of Beşalma.

This dream is the Dream of the Mother of God.  
 When *Panaiya* fell asleep on mount *Eleon*  
 She saw in Jerusalem,  
 Her Son being crucified,  
 Our God [*Allahımız*] Jesus Christ.  
 And Peter was in Rome, and Paul in Damascus.  
 As she slept in her sleep,  
 He saw the Mother of God,  
 - Oh mother, my mother,  
 My dear mother,  
 When you slept  
 What did you see in your dream?  
 - My son, my son,  
 I saw you,  
 Being stretched on the cross,  
 Between two soldiers.  
 They caught you,  
 They bound you,  
 They spat in your face,  
 They spoke evil words.  
 On your head they placed a crown of thorns.  
 They gave you to Pilat to be tried.  
 Your hands and feet were being nailed to the cross,  
 One of the thieves stabbed you in the side with a lance,  
 Blood and water flow from that place [the wound],  
 The blood is for Communion wine,

<sup>497</sup> Veselovskii, 'Opyty po istorii', p. 357.

The water is for Baptism.  
 They [fill] you with bile,  
 With vinegar to your mouth.  
 They killed you on the cross, my son.  
 Joseph and Nikodemus took you down from the cross,  
 And carried you to the new tomb.  
 And they brought you then, my son, to Joseph,  
 And it brings to us great joy,  
 The angels will read:  
 - Christ has risen from the dead,  
 He has brought us joy,  
 He sits on the right side of his Father.  
 - Mother, my mother,  
 My beloved mother,  
 Everything in your dream is correct.  
 All of this I will go through,  
 [...] for salvation.  
 Whoever shall rely on the Dream of the Mother of God,  
 And take it with them from house to house,  
 That man will be healthy and well.  
 Whoever shall also write the Dream of the Mother of God,  
 [...] will protect then in many places,  
 In his house will rest the Holy Spirit,  
 God's angel will protect,  
 That man from every bad place,  
 From death, and from sudden death,  
 From fire and from the sword,  
 From hail and also from lightening,  
 From waters [drowning] and from every bad place.  
 Whoever goes to trial,  
 At their side will be the Dream of the Mother of God,  
 And they will go back free from guilt.  
 Whoever goes to marry,  
 And has at his side the Dream of the Mother of God,  
 He will come back healthy and happy.  
 The mother who gives birth to a small child,  
 At her side will be the Dream of the Mother of God,  
 She will be healthy and [will have] good man also.  
 However much one has sinned,  
 When man prays to God,  
 With all his heart,  
 God will forgive that man.  
 I too will see [...],  
 And the Archangel Michael,  
 Will take that man's soul,  
 And will carry him to my Heaven,  
 To Abraham and to Isaac,  
 And he will be joyful,

There everything will be brought to right in my heaven.  
 Pray only to Panaiya,  
 [to] Jesus Christ for you sufferings,  
 And for your blood,  
 Which you spilled for us,  
 For our sins.  
 Forgive us Martyr John the Baptist,  
 Jesus Christ protect us from every bad place.  
 Amen.

(Mariya İngilis, village of *Beşalma*, recorded on 08.06.04, see Appendix 4, text 3)

Moses Gaster, writing about Romanian Marian legends in the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, is impressed by the significance of this legendary form of prayer on the basis of the dream sequence. Due to the new ideas about the origins of religion in animism and advances in the field of psychoanalysis at the time he was writing, in his opinion, this 'text' is of particular interest and significance.<sup>498</sup> Together with Simon Florin Marian, the 19<sup>th</sup> century Romanian collector of Marian legends, Gaster also connects the 'Dream of the Mother of God' and its theme of *Mater Dolorosa* with 'more ancient' narratives such as the Babylonian legends of Ishtar and the Egyptian tales of Isis in search of the body of Osiris. Mircea Eliade too considers the religious folklore surrounding the figure of the Virgin Mary to be a repository for myths and cults of pagan goddesses.<sup>499</sup> These ancient narratives, and perhaps more soberly a Hebrew hymn in Aramaic from the 5<sup>th</sup> century that narrates Jochabed's search for Moses, are considered by Gaster to have become combined to form another Romanian Marian legend *Căutarea Maicii Domnului*, the 'Search of The Mother of God' for her lost son.<sup>500</sup> This Marian search motif also appears in Gagauz prayer and religious folksong, the clearest example of which is a prayer collected in the village of *Avdarma* that is almost identical in structure and content to the two Romanian examples published in English translation by Gaster<sup>501</sup> and in numerous variants in the original

<sup>498</sup> M. Gaster, *Studies and Texts in Folklore, Magic, Medieval Romance, Hebrew Apocrypha and Samaritan Archaeology*, Vol. II, New York: KTAV Publishing House Inc., 1971, pp. 1116-1117

<sup>499</sup> M. Eliade, *A History of Religious Ideas*, Vol. 3, Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1998, p. 221.

<sup>500</sup> See Gaster, *Studies and Texts*, pp. 1116-1117 and S. Marian, *Legendele Maicii Domnului*, Bucharest: Editura Ecco, p. 109. The origins of the Romanian *Căutarea Domnului* are explored at some length in an essay by Rosa del Conte: 'Cele două mame din Peregrinatio Virginis românească cunoscută sub numele de "Căutarea Maicii Domnului"', in Marian, 'Legendele Maicii Domnului', pp. 321-344. Erdélyi also discusses the origins of the 'Marian Search' motif in Erdélyi, *Aki ezt az imádságot*, pp. 18-21.

<sup>501</sup> Gaster, *Studies and Texts*, pp. 1118-1129.

Romanian collected and published by Marian.<sup>502</sup> The following extract introduces just the beginning of the search motif as it appears in the Gagauz variant:

There was a big man,  
He took a big axe,  
He went into the big forest,  
He cut a big tree,  
He built a big monastery,  
With nine domes,  
And with nine altars.  
On one of them sat the Mother Mary,  
On another sat John the Baptist.  
Mother Mary sat and looked on all sides,  
- John the Baptist have you seen my little son who is also your  
godson?  
- Mother Mary I haven't seen him,  
But I heard that on *Karagan* hill they have crucified him.  
They hammered nails into his hands and feet,  
And on his head they placed a crown of thorns.  
When Mother Mary heard this she stood up and started to run.  
She runs and she is crying,  
She comes across a frog,  
The frog asks her:  
- Mother Mary why are you crying so?  
- Oh, frog, frog my son has been crucified on mount *Kalagan*.  
They hammered nails into his hands and feet,...

(Collected from Kristova Evdokiya Feoderovna, born 1930,  
*Avdarma* and her granddaughter Kristova Lilia Petrovna, born  
1997, on 11.02.06, see Appendix 4, text 4)

This portrayal of the suffering Mother, who whilst searching for her son hears about his crucifixion from travellers or one of the evangelists, and which also appears in a number of Gagauz religious folksongs,<sup>503</sup> gives the narrative a heightened sense of drama and another layer of anguish for the performer to identify with or experience and may account for what Erdélyi terms this narrative's 'ability to elicit grace'.<sup>504</sup> From a theological perspective it was the understanding of this ability of such devotional practices to channel grace and earn salvation that gave rise to such diverse forms in prose and poetic

<sup>502</sup> Marian, *Legende*, pp. 109-284.

<sup>503</sup> Kvilinkova presents three songs that open with this search motif. See E. Kvilinkova, *Moldova Gagauzların Halk Türküleri*, Chişinău: Pontus, 2003, pp. 34-36.

<sup>504</sup> Erdélyi, 'Aki ezt az imádságot', p. 20.

literatures, plays and prayers. It was perhaps precisely because the purpose and function of such religious practices and manifestations was so clearly understood that they embedded themselves so thoroughly in the medieval religious psyche. It is this functional aspect of the 'archaic' prayers that finds explicit articulation in the closing formulas, the final component that completes or ratifies the transaction between the individual and the divine that has gone before.

### 7.3 The Closing Formula

Erdélyi regards the closing formula as the 'sui generis marker' of 'archaic' prayers that 'act as a compass in the philological labyrinth' presented by the genre.<sup>505</sup> In her view they offer the most clues with regard to the origins of 'archaic' prayer as well as one of the most convincing explanations for their 'survival'.<sup>506</sup> The closing formulas express the conditions under which clemency, the remission of sins, alleviation of suffering, or salvation can be earned. Typically they are delivered directly by divine beings and are therefore presented as being beyond doubt or question in their sincerity. These two features, their status as the direct words of divine agents, made possible due to the quality of agency inherent in language, and the certain or contractual nature of the transaction, have the effect, in the eyes of the Church, of radically separating them from canonical traditions of prayer. Examples of these closing formulas can be found in the Gagauz prayers presented above but it is worth taking another look at these examples, plus an additional more elaborate example, in order to highlight their particular character.

- *Kim benim bu duamı bilecek hem söylecek,...*  
- Whoever shall know and say this prayer of mine,  
On Thursday in the evening five times,  
On Friday in the morning six times,  
For them an angel will come and carry them to rest,  
On the honey wax throne, to Abraham's,  
Isaacs' and Jacob's bosom,  
Amen.<sup>507</sup>

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<sup>505</sup> Erdélyi, *Aki ezt az imádságot*, p. 15.

<sup>506</sup> Ibid., p. 35.

<sup>507</sup> See full text on page 234 and for the Gagauz language original see Appendix 3, text 1.



- *Kim bu molitvayı bilecek...*

- Whoever will know this prayer,  
In fire will not be burned,  
In water will not  
Be drowned.  
For ever and ever,  
Amin.<sup>508</sup>

- *Kim bunu okuyêr bu molitvayı...*

- Whoever will read this prayer or hear this prayer read or whoever will carry it at their side will not die a sudden death, nor be poisoned by any poison, they will come to no harm and will not fall into the hands of enemies and they will never be defeated thus and a woman who listens to or carries at her side or reads it, that woman will be saved every time and she will be saved from all difficulty and she will be a loving mother when her child is born. Put this prayer on your right side and you will be protected from every kind of nasty disease. If you see a man that has fallen ill from an evil disease, put this prayer at his right side [and] it is sure that he will rise healthy. Whoever writes this prayer themselves or with another they will be blessed said *Allah* or whoever laughs at it will be punished and in whoever's house this prayer is found they will be saved from fear. Whoever reads this prayer every day will be warned of their death with a holy sign at that hour at the end of time. Amen.<sup>509</sup>

The first thing to note about these formulas is what Erdélyi terms the 'causal-logical relationship', which is based on the exact fulfillment of certain conditions in order to secure a desired result. Prayers based on this kind of premise appear to have been widespread in medieval Europe. Keith Thomas sites an example from the Enchiridion of Salisbury Cathedral that is strikingly similar in form and tone to the examples above: 'Whoever sayeth this prayer following in the worship of God and St Rock shall not die of the pestilence by the grace of God'. He suggests that it was the medieval Church that

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<sup>508</sup> See text on page 236 and for Gagauz language text see Appendix 4, text 2.

<sup>509</sup> From the notebook of Radiş Vasilisa Vasilevna, village of *Kazayak*. A photograph of the original Gagauz text appears in Appendix 3, text 5 followed by a transliteration into standard Gagauz latin orthography. This longer more elaborate form of closing formula is from a prayer or *epistoliya* that is associated with the names of Pope Leo III and the Emperor Charlemagne. This form of prayer belongs to a category often referred to as the 'Heavenly Letters', which were commonly carried as talismans by soldiers and were found all over Central and Eastern Europe. These are discussed at greater length in chapter 3 (see pages 115-116).

‘weakened the fundamental distinction between prayer and charm’ by introducing into prayer a form of ‘mechanistic manipulation’ that is proper to magic.<sup>510</sup>

Erdélyi discovered numerous historical literary precedents dating back to the 13th century for the kind of ‘logical construction’ that not only works automatically or mechanistically in the way Thomas describes but also connects the recitation, identification, and emotional or psychological experience of the Passion of Christ and/or the sorrow of the Virgin Mary with the closing formula in the generation or attainment of grace and merit for the person praying.<sup>511</sup> The devotional exercise of sharing in the suffering of Christ and the Virgin Mary, which as we saw above, was seen as a valid component of the path to personal salvation from at least the end of the 13th century, is expressed in much more concrete and causal form in these closing formulas. Not only that, the recitation of the prayers is connected to this-worldly as well as other-worldly benefits. In the examples given above we see assurances against death from drowning and fire, from all manner of illnesses and misfortune, from enemies, from poison and from sudden death and there are countless other examples we could present here. These are balanced to a certain degree with reference to forgiveness of sins, salvation of the soul, and, at the hour of death, transmission directly to heaven, to the ‘bosom of Abraham and Isaac’.<sup>512</sup> However, the overwhelming impression from the Gagauz material is that they primarily fulfill a protective function. Scholars of the genre, as well as clerics that have commented on this form of prayer, consider there to be a tension between the this-worldly material relating to existential concerns and those connected with the transcendental other-worldly concerns of the next life. Tánzos, when discussing Hungarian prayers from Moldavia, considers that ‘the concretization of the goal of the prayer often brings about a transformation of the relationship with the divinity’ in that the concrete this-worldly aims first appear in the form of a supplication or petition only to take on more coercive magical characteristics later in their development.<sup>513</sup> This kind of appraisal reinforces the kind of radical separation between the two extremes of magic and religion that we met earlier.

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<sup>510</sup> Thomas, *Religion and the Decline*, pp. 46-47.

<sup>511</sup> Erdélyi, ‘*Aki ezt az imádságot*’, p. 50.

<sup>512</sup> It is interesting to note at this point that the popularity of closing formulas of this kind appears coincide with the new emphasis on and the increase in significance in popular religious practice of the doctrine purgatory that came in the 14<sup>th</sup> century. See Eliade, *Religious Ideas*, p. 207.

<sup>513</sup> Tánzos, *Csapdosó angyal*, p. 252.

Magical elements are associated with the 'folk' tendency for coercive techniques; religion with a more genuine and respectful relationship with the divine.

However, this is not the only reason why the closing formulas of 'archaic' prayers might be frowned upon by the clergy, as Erdélyi explains.

In the interests of impartiality we should state that the opposition of the church was just. Priests that were ordained to protect the purity of the faith out of necessity could attack certain component elements [of the prayers] mainly on the grounds of the 'truths' expressed in the closing formulas; in the Church's terms these are indeed truly unsanctionable prayers, which profess some kind of self-absolvment: the forgiveness of sins without priest and without sacrament.<sup>514</sup>

Therefore, not only are these prayers considered to be counter to church teaching in relation to personal salvation, they also undermine the role of the clergy as mediator with the divine realm. In this regard it is important to note that, as with much of the *epistoliya* literature and the *okumak* charms, the words of the prayers are ascribed directly to holy messengers and the divine realm, and in some cases *Allah* himself. This is the case both with the narrative accounts of the Passion that are introduced and recounted in the words of variously a holy angel, a saint, or Jesus himself, and the closing formulas, which are introduced by one of these holy personages and are then often reiterated as originating with *Allah* as in the example that follows.

- *Kim yazıcek bu molitvayı kendisinä yäkidä başkasına onu ii sözleyecek dedi Allah*  
- Whoever writes this prayer for themselves or for another he will be well blessed said Allah.

This way of framing 'archaic' prayers gives them a distinctive 'immanent' and 'unmediated' quality that reinforces their authority as a direct source of blessing, protection and salvation.

Gagauz clergy, as far as they are aware of prayers such as *Panaiyan düşü* and their precise content, consider them on one level to be 'ridiculous' and, as we have already seen, from time to time preach against their use; they are seen as part of the same 'genus' of

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<sup>514</sup> Erdélyi, 'Aki ezt az imádságot', p. 46.

dubious texts, practices and activities as the *epistoliya*, the *okumak*, and the activity of healers. However, it should be said that knowledge and use of 'archaic' prayers remains a somewhat 'unknown' tradition, not least because the 'institutions' of lay practice that operated, and continue to, in the 'unregulated' religious field that flourished during the Soviet period are largely private and 'covert' by nature.

From the textual and historical analysis we have explored above, based on the academic and theological concerns of regional scholars, we can clearly see why this form of prayer is considered anachronistic and fraught with tensions between opposing principles such as magic and religion, prayer and incantation, and canon and apocrypha. There are further dichotomies that reveal themselves through these sets of relations such as between 'mediated' and 'unmediated' relations with the divine, coercion and supplication, and the 'this-worldly' and the 'other-worldly' or existential and transcendental concerns of religious practice.

#### 7.4 Prayer in Context and Performance

We have spent some time unpacking the textual basis of 'archaic' prayers, the prescribed or invariant aspects of prayer that are intrinsic to and predicated on the message and meaning of 'words'. We have done this before approaching the actual practice of these prayers, the more obviously 'variant' aspects such as the particular person, the particular place and conditions under which it is uttered, for a couple of reasons. Firstly, as we highlighted earlier, there are some serious methodological problems that present themselves when we approach the private 'prayer-life' of individuals. Presenting what essentially could be described as the 'formulaic' or 'prescribed' aspects of prayer first reflects the process that emerged in the field when questioning informants on their prayer life. In order to gain a shared understanding with my informants of my aims in discussing prayer, it was necessary for informants to actually recite their prayers for me audibly. I avoided asking such questions as 'What do you pray for?' or 'How can prayer help you?' as I judged such questions invite responses that relate to what informants think about prayer or believe about prayer rather than the 'doing' of prayer. Therefore, I would ask people to say prayers in order for me to record them, soliciting first and foremost prayers in the Gagauz language. Informants' knowledge of Russian language prayers was largely

restricted to *Oche Naş* and *Simvol Veriyu* and, for reasons discussed earlier, many older informants also knew canonical prayers in Romanian. Broadly speaking the Gagauz language was the medium for 'archaic' prayers, improvised 'composite' prayers and some canonical prayers taken from Çakır's *Dua Kitabı*. For these reasons I give below some brief insights into the 'field' experience of engaging with the prayer life of individuals with the aim of demonstrating under what circumstances the data presented above were collected and how, given the methodological difficulties, we are still able to draw some conclusions about the place of 'archaic prayer' in the wider context of Gagauz religious life and what these prayers actually 'do' in the religious field.

All the prayers I observed and recorded, except those within the context of the liturgy, were specially requested from informants. In this sense the circumstances were always artificial; informants had time to think about, and in some cases rehearse, the prayers that they performed. What would normally be recited or read privately, and perhaps also silently, at my request became public and audible. We could say that they constituted a 'performance' of the act of prayer rather than the act of prayer itself. Often the performance of a prayer or prayers acted to precipitate a discussion amongst informants (I rarely met with informants alone as family members or neighbours tend to congregate whenever a stranger or guest appears) about prayer and prayer-life. These 'naturally' evolving conversations often proved more illuminating than question-led interviews.

On one occasion I was invited to the Kristov family, the owners of the local *banya* or steam bath, in the village of *Avdarma*, to speak to the grandmother of the family, someone active in the Church who according to her son knew many prayers. While enjoying a drink after bathing I had the opportunity to explain something of my research to Piotr Kristov before visiting them later that evening. When we arrived, together with members of my host family in *Avdarma*, we were advised that the grandmother was not well and wouldn't be able to speak but that she had taught all that she knew to her grandchildren and that they would be able to 'pray' for me. The father of the household, with the grandmother lying in bed in the background attached to an intravenous drip, directed his two young children, aged 9 and 5, to stand in front of the icons in the corner of the room, to cross themselves and to pray the prayers their grandmother had taught them, first the 5 year old boy *Piotr* and then his older sister *Lilia*. Both were clearly nervous and they faltered in places and struggled to recite the prayers word-perfect; at these points the

grandmother interjected with encouragement and prompts. The two Gagauz language prayers that the children recited were ‘archaic’ prayers; one of which was presented above (see page 242). A little later in the evening, still reclining in her sick bed, the grandmother was able to recite the prayers again for me as well as give some insights into how these prayers, which are the prayers that she prays daily, were being passed on or disseminated. She explained that one of the prayers had been learnt from a nun at the monastery in *Chițcani*; she had then taught to her granddaughter *Lilia*, who to the amusement of the family, had been overheard teaching it to other children in the local hospital in *Komrat*, when she was there visiting her grandmother. Besides the two ‘archaic’ prayers that were recited that evening, the family also had a hand-written copy of *Panaiyan dūșū*, which, possibly due to its length, appears to be read in this family rather than recited from memory. Later, the father of the family *Piotr*, offered to pray in order for me to record him too, this time a Russian prayer to the Archangel Michael for travellers that he had been given at a monastery. As the evening progressed I also learnt that the grandmother was renowned for ‘reading’ *Oche Naș* or ‘Our Father’ to cure minor ailments in her family and that the children had picked up some short prayers and expressions from their grandmother, such a *Spasi gospody büükü günää*: ‘Thank the Lord for this day’, by just listening and repeating. As the conversation progressed a wealth of everyday stories and anecdotes emerged that related to the family’s prayer life emerged. It became clear that the grandmother, who was very charismatic, had an excellent memory and was renowned for her piety and that this ensured that her religious knowledge was infusing the family. The performance of prayer, initiated by my requests to record prayers, facilitated the transmission of prayer within the family and opened up a forum that revealed how in the past prayer had been transmitted amongst family members and the wider community.

On another occasion, whilst recording two informants in the village of *Beșalma*, it emerged in conversation that both had learnt ‘archaic’ prayers from the same old woman, *Sonyi Babu*, a locally revered ‘prophet’ who it was believed could foresee future events and who frequently visited the local monasteries. As young children they would go with her to the fields and sit and learn prayers from her. Both of them had learnt an archaic prayer from *Sonyi Babu*, one of them *Panaiyan dūșū*<sup>515</sup> and the other *Ayoz Cuma*<sup>516</sup> and

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<sup>515</sup> See text on page 234.

<sup>516</sup> See text on page 239.

both reported that these prayers were the prayers they prayed regularly every morning because, in their words, they are ‘very beautiful prayers’. Whilst recording one of them recite *Panaiyan düşü*, first one of them, and then the other, began to weep. When the prayer closed the women exclaimed how sad this prayer is, how much the Mother of God had suffered and how this was a very powerful prayer for this reason. This also led them to add that *Panaiyan düşü* is prayed at the bedside of those who are seriously ill or on the brink of death.<sup>517</sup>

Trying to engage with the prayer life of an individual or a family and to understand where and how certain prayers are performed is problematic. However, despite the artificiality of the context, observations and experiences of the kind described above can serve as pointers towards what we shall call here the institutional parameters of ‘archaic’ prayer. When considering prayer as an institution, that is prayer as a set of the institutional facts that give it its meaning and its social reality, there are two fundamental and interrelated factors that should be addressed. The first is the process of transmission and reception, and the second the speech act as performative utterance.

### 7.5 Transmission and Reception of ‘Texts’

As we established at the beginning of this study, when we refer to ‘text’ it can be understood as one of two kinds. One is transmitted in written form, i.e. ‘text’ in the fullest sense of the word, while the other is ‘text’ that is ‘orally instituted’, that is stored in and retrieved from memory. Assmann refers to the concrete and particular occasions when the communication or ‘text’ is uttered as the ‘expanded context’ and he goes on to assert that:

In the case of oral transmission, the expanded context calls for a far more intensive formalisation than in developed written cultures, and it generally assumes the character of a ritual.<sup>518</sup>

<sup>517</sup> In the recent past the special function of *Panaiyan düşü* seems to have been attached to certain individuals that would be called to recite the prayer when someone appeared to be approaching death. I heard several accounts of women in the villages of *Kazayak*, *Kurçu* and *Beşalma*, now mostly dead or of very advanced age, who could recite the whole of *Panaiyan düşü* from memory at such times. However, by the early years of the 21st century this seems to have become a very rare skill. I was able to find only two women that could recite the whole prayer, one of whom had recently suffered a stroke and was now unable to speak clearly. The prayer continues to circulate in written form and, as discussed in chapter 3, is one of the most common texts found in *tetradkas*.

<sup>518</sup> J. Assmann, *Religion and Cultural Memory*, Stanford University Press: Stanford, 2006, p. 105.

Here the 'expanded context', the mechanism and mode of transmission of the text, constitutes a defining feature of what we shall call the 'institution' of prayer. The conversations and narrative accounts cited above tell us much about the way that prayers are disseminated and the various paths along which they pass from individual to individual and from generation to generation, not just within the family but also in the community and amongst children, between religious professionals and lay believers, and how this can happen in both a 'formal' and 'informal' way. Significantly, we also learn that the act of prayer can be an act of transmission; in praying the prayer one simultaneously both prays and transmits. The basis for the institutionalization of the text is its performance and commitment to memory, from where it can be easily retrieved. Of course Gagauz society in general cannot be described as 'orally' based. The vast majority of the population, except for the very elderly, is at least competent, if not fluent, in both spoken and written Russian. However, there exists a disjuncture between the written and the spoken idiom: the primary written medium for Gagauz speakers is not the Gagauz language but Russian, which is used in all official institutions and public bodies, whereas the Gagauz language is generally the preferred medium of everyday conversation. Perhaps, partly because of this disjuncture, there appears to be a residue in the sphere of prayer, also the case with *okumak* charms, of cultural transmission based on storage and retrieval from memory. This is not something exclusive; there is plenty of evidence of 'archaic' prayer being transmitted in written form also, but I would suggest that the orality of the 'text' is linked to their status as texts in the Gagauz language. That is to say that Gagauz language texts are more readily consigned to memory and as such the 'institution' of prayer, the means and mode of transmission and reception, is linked to the status, role and linguistic capital of the Gagauz language. However, this is not to suggest that the 'archaic' prayers we find amongst the Gagauz either started out life as Gagauz language texts or that only Gagauz language texts are transmitted orally.<sup>519</sup> The texts of 'archaic' prayers, and of the *okumak* of the *ilaççi*, exist in and through the medium of the Gagauz language, the most congenial medium for oral transmission. This conjuncture of the mother tongue, the Gagauz idiom, with the ability of language to cast its 'agency' in the shape of the divine

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<sup>519</sup> There is some evidence to show that most Gagauz 'archaic' prayers translations from Romanian and in all probability entered the oral repertoire only within the last couple of generations.



allowing Jesus, angels and even *Allah* to speak directly in performance, lies at the heart of Gagauz religious practice and the formation of lay institutions.

From the accounts cited above we can see that transmission can happen in a piecemeal or seemingly arbitrary way or as part of a more formalised and purposeful process. The 'institution' of 'archaic' prayer, as with other forms of institution we have examined in this study, is reliant on the conditions of transmission and reception. The practice and transmission of 'archaic' prayers, although essentially private, is not confined to family circles. The 'naked text' alone, abstracted from the expanded context of the institution of practice, with all its particularities or variables of context, cannot transmit meaning or impact on social realities.

## 7.6 Prayer as Performance

Having seen how this ostensibly private form of prayer is transmitted socially between individuals, we shall return now to the actual practice of prayer and address the question of the 'performative' power of 'archaic' prayer. Observations and narrative accounts of the context of 'archaic prayer' in the field suggest that these prayers have a special emotional impact or power. This appears to be bound up with, on the one hand, their message and enactment of the human suffering of Jesus and the Mother of God, but also their resonance as Gagauz language representations of that suffering. This in turn seems to operate to ensure their continued transmission and performance of 'archaic' prayer, even down to the very youngest generation. Taking this together with the interpretations of the function of these prayers that academic scholarship has provided, which is based on their historical and theological antecedents, in the following pages we shall try to establish a 'language' that is useful in describing what archaic prayers 'do' in the religious lives of Gagauz believers that perform them and how they fit into the matrix of the broader intercourse with the divine that has been discussed in this study so far.

Prayer in general, according to William James, should be seen as an 'active and mutual' intercourse in which something is 'transacted' between the person praying and 'higher powers'. This 'transaction' in prayer has gone under many names. The following are just a few employed by Sabatier; 'interior dialogue', 'intimate commerce', 'interchange' or 'the action of God in man'. In the light of our discussions with regard to

contractual nature of the closing formulas of 'archaic' prayer the term 'transaction' seems to be a particularly fitting term to describe this process. William James himself goes on to assert that in 'experimental religion and prayerful life, we seem ourselves to be actors, and not in a play, but in a very serious reality'.<sup>520</sup> Again, the analogy he uses here of 'actors' in 'reality', rather than their customary role in plays, seem peculiarly fitting given the connections that Erdélyi and others demonstrate between this kind of prayer and the performance of medieval passion plays that, in many ways, can be seen to be 'positioned between drama and ritual'.<sup>521</sup> Therefore, in the search for an appropriate language to describe what is being 'done' in 'archaic' prayer, these references to drama and ritual seem particularly salient. According to Roy Rappaport, a key factor that separates actors in a play from participants in a ritual, and I believe in this sense we are justified in categorising prayer alongside ritual for reasons we will discuss shortly, is that their actions are 'not understood to affect directly the world's events' whereas rituals, and prayers, 'are not simply "saying something" about themselves but "doing something" about the state of the world.'<sup>522</sup>

At this point we should say something about certain correlations that exist between prayer and ritual. In earlier chapters when discussing healing practices we were dealing with ritual 'proper', that is practices that are generally recognised and categorised as ritual that combine 'word' and 'action', and therefore there was perhaps no great need to justify our use of terminology and concepts borrowed from anthropological studies of ritual. Even with regards to the toast prayers we discussed in the previous chapter, the ritual dimension of the practice was quite evident. Mauss, whose comments on prayer opened this chapter, was one of the first to point out the close associations between prayer and ritual: 'To speak is both to act and to think: that is why prayer gives rise to belief and ritual at the same time'. For Mauss prayer could be seen essentially as a 'ritual form of speech' that, as with other forms of speech, 'has an aim and an effect; it is always, basically, an instrument of action'.<sup>523</sup> This is not the only reason that one might make certain connections between these two phenomena. The following points, by no means exhaustive, are largely taken

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<sup>520</sup> James, *The Varieties*, pp. 444-45.

<sup>521</sup> R. Rappaport, *Ritual and Religion in the Making of Humanity*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999, p. 41.

<sup>522</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 47.

<sup>523</sup> Mauss, *On Prayer*, p. 22.

from Rappaport's definition of the form and substance of ritual<sup>524</sup> and although each of them could be contested, with regards to both ritual as well as prayer, they do carry a certain resonance, especially when considering 'archaic' prayer. Firstly, there appears to be 'systematic relationship to the emotions' in ritual that can also be observed with regards to prayer. Secondly, the notion that religious ritual focuses the attention of forces or agencies beyond the 'patent' world and that they are in some way 'communicating' or 'transacting' with them is also, we can maintain, one of the most basic factors upon which prayer is predicated. Finally, the efficacy of rituals relies primarily on words, as prayer does, and those words, certainly in the case of formalised prayer such as the 'archaic' prayers we have been looking at, rely on such things as linguistic forms as repetition, invariance and formality.

Broadly speaking there are two trends within ritual studies, one that draws on communication theory, signification, and semiotics as a basis for understanding ritual, and the other that relies on 'performative' approaches and pragmatic linguistics. In the light of Mauss's comments on prayer and Rappaport's defining features of ritual, the activity of prayer would seem to be the place where these two streams of thought naturally converge. However, one key aspect of private prayer in particular would seem to radically distinguish it from ritual proper: the solitary and non-participatory nature of many forms of prayer. Prayer can readily and easily be approached as a communication between the person praying and the divine; it is perhaps less clear how it constitutes a 'performance' in the commonly understood sense of the word. However, as Joel Robbins points out, 'the part of reality that ritual transforms' is very often the participant himself or herself and not the audience necessarily.<sup>525</sup> In this sense, prayer too, much like ritual, can be seen to have its 'performative' effect on the person or persons performing the prayer rather than on any audience or observer.

From the examples of archaic prayers we have looked at, from both a propositional and 'performative' standpoint, some form of transformation in the status or condition of the person praying appears to be the object of the performance of these prayers. Propositionally, as we have seen, the person praying is understood in the text to be

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<sup>524</sup> Rappaport, *Ritual and Religion*, pp. 23-68.

<sup>525</sup> J. Robbins, 'Ritual Communication and Linguistic Ideology: A Reading and Partial Reformulation of Rappaport's Theory of Ritual', *Current Anthropology*, 42:5 (2001), pp. 591-602.

securing protection and/or salvation. The result, said to be assured by *Allah*, is that through the recitation of the prayer according to the prescribed instructions, a state of spiritual cleanliness or 'acceptableness' before the divine that, to name but a few examples, guarantees protection from worldly harm, forewarning of the time of death, and direct transference to the celestial realm at the time of death. Lovász explains this process by drawing on Lotman's notion of the 'auto-communicative mode'. This mode, which according to Lotman is particularly characteristic of 'artistic and religious' texts, is said to operate not by communicating 'new quantitative information' but by 'qualitatively charging' the participants and 'transforming the identity and self-image' of the reader. Lovász goes on to explain, based on Lotman's theory, that rather than communicating a message in the conventional sense, this kind of text operates as a 'code' that has the qualitative effect of transforming the narrative event into direct experience.<sup>526</sup>

However, this process can perhaps be more clearly understood using the language of 'performance' rather than of 'communication'. In terms of the 'performative' quality of 'archaic' prayers we suggest that a change or affirmation in the state of affairs has also taken place. This can be viewed as an act of establishing 'credibility' or 'trust' and 'credence'. This operates on a couple of levels. Firstly, it is a way of demonstrating or confirming the unmediated and direct relations with the divine, in the form of a direct intercourse with the divine agent, via the agency of language, during the act of performance. Within this context the performer himself or herself utters the words said to be those of God or his divine messenger in the form of a binding illocutionary 'pledge'. Secondly, the performance operates as, what we will term here, an 'auto-performance', a direct positioning of the 'self' in the holy drama, as a way of assimilating knowledge of the suffering experience of Christ or the Virgin Mary, and integrating that knowledge on an emotional level to bring about an ontological change. Thus, the performance is 'simultaneously the creation of the effect'; the very act of performance effects the result. These two factors come together in archaic prayer to ensure that 'to experience' is also 'to establish' that the person praying both warrants being saved and 'is saved', and has earned or is guaranteed protection and 'is protected'.

At the beginning of the previous chapter we highlighted some of the basic characteristics of Orthodox prayerlife according to Church doctrine, namely: that prayer

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<sup>526</sup> Lovász, *Szagrális Kommunikáció*, p. 50.

should be comprised first of praise of the divine, and then be followed by request from the divine, and that this essentially is a corporate communal activity for the whole body of the Church. There are therefore some rather important points of divergence between 'archaic' prayers and officially sanctioned forms of prayer. We have already discussed at some length how the individual praying is said to experience the sufferings of Christ and the Virgin Mary by 'ritually re-living' the biblical events in order to personally warrant protection from harm and eternal salvation. This form of prayer can therefore best be characterised by the words 'participation' and 'reward.' As we have seen, this difference in character has determined both the attitude of the Church towards these prayers and the nature of academic scholarship.

Certain elements of this tradition, when viewed from the perspective of the Church and academic scholarship betray a complex of tensions between opposing polarities. Many of these are familiar from our discussions in earlier chapters, such as the polar relations between magic and religion, prayer and incantation, and canon and apocrypha. In addition, the tradition of 'archaic' prayer also brings into sharp relief the tension between 'mediated' and 'unmediated' modes of intercourse with the divine. The power of 'archaic' prayer resides partly in their status as a direct channel of intercourse, through the agency of language, with the celestial realm. This is something they hold in common with the *ilaççı* healers and their *okumak* charms and the texts of the *epistoliyas*.

In the case of 'archaic' prayer this intercourse with the divine operates by combining the authority of the 'divine' text, the power of the performance, and experiential knowledge. In the act of performance, the person praying, by drawing on the divine authority located in the text, establishes trust or credence in the power of the altered emotional state. This in turn gives the narrative event, in the words of Vivien Burr, the 'stamp of the truth'.<sup>527</sup>

As we highlighted at the beginning of this thesis Pierre Bourdieu, in his critique of Austin's theory of performative speech acts, states that 'authority comes to language from outside' and it is through the involvement or participation in the 'authority of the institution' that invests the words with their 'performative' power.<sup>528</sup> In other words, the force represented or manifested within the words of the speech act resides outside the text.

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<sup>527</sup> Burr, *Social Constructionism*, p. 57.

<sup>528</sup> P. Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power*, Polity Press: Oxford, 1994, p. 109.

The ability of 'archaic' prayer to alter ontological reality and structure cosmological and social relations has its source in the correlation between the divine 'word' or 'instruction' that is embedded in the institution of the 'text' and the agency of language, and the emotions, experience or knowledge of reality of the believer against which it is tested in the act of performance.

## Conclusion

Shortly before this thesis was submitted in September 2008, a yearlong consultation involving the Church, the State and the academic community culminated in the announcement of a special conference to determine an official date for the annual commemoration of the time and place of the Christianization of the Gagauz. The importance attached to the event by the Executive Committee of the Government of *Gagauziya*, the State University of Comrat and the Holy Bishopric of Comrat & Cahul, is a clear demonstration of the powerful symbolic capital invested in the mythic past and a restatement of the central role of Orthodox Christianity in shaping a modern Gagauz 'official' identity as reflected in the conference's title: 'Orthodoxy and the Identity of the Gagauz'.<sup>529</sup>

This announcement came shortly before the People's Assembly of the Gagauz Autonomous Region expressed its sympathy to the people of South Ossetia and praised Russian intervention in the break-away Georgian region following the Russian invasion on the 8<sup>th</sup> of August.<sup>530</sup> *Gagauziya*'s own situation in the early 1990s showed a remarkable resemblance to that of South Ossetia today and popular opinion remains staunchly pro-Russian. As this thesis has tried to demonstrate Gagauz religious identity has been shaped by the broader context of the political and the national agendas of the competing states in the region (most significantly today Russia and Moldova, which are increasingly pitched on opposite sides of an East-West divide). What is certain is that the historical political, economic and social factors intimately bound up with the agendas and aspirations of the regional powers will continue to determine the shape of the macro-discourse on Gagauz identity and religion and invariably play a major role in shaping any decision reached in determining an officially sanctioned Gagauz identity past and present.

Previous representations of Gagauz religion, like those introduced at the beginning of this thesis that stress Islamic influences and its heterodox character, dominate the literature on Gagauz religion and identity and present a picture that contrasts sharply with my own portrayal of Gagauz religious practice in this study. This can partly be explained

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<sup>529</sup> The conference was due to take place in *Çadır-Lunga* from the 6<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> of November 2008.

<sup>530</sup> On the 8<sup>th</sup> of August 2008, in response to Georgia's attempt to regain control of the break-away region of South Ossetia, Russian tanks rolled into Georgia and occupied large areas of the country.

by the profound difference we have explored in this thesis between the national discourse on the 'folk' and the religion of the 'folk', with its ethno-national agenda, Church and academic discourses, with their own set of biases and agendas inherited from theological imperatives, and what I term the 'field of practice' of folk religion that unfolds in the micro-episodes of everyday lived religion.

Yet, despite these marked contrasts in the constructed narratives (and I include my own in this), both the macro-discourse and the micro-discourse are demonstrably the product of wider geo-political, economic and social factors. The whole shape and structure of lay practice would look very different had the broader context of Gagauz religion and culture evolved differently. Political acts and actors continue to shape the lives and identities of Gagauz practitioners who in turn, through their own expressions of religious agency, shape the institutions of a lay practice.

It was the aim of this research project to capture something of lay religious practice and in so doing highlight the role of language in the establishment and maintenance of institutions, be they Church or lay in character. Language is significant on a number of levels. First, direct relations and modes of communication with the divine established through the texts of Gagauz religious practice rely on the agency of language itself to generate authority, enact 'states of affairs' and reiterate cosmological realities. Second, the imperative to increase the linguistic capital of the Gagauz language in the religious sphere, by both clerical and lay agents, was instrumental in establishing institutional structures that today rely on and valorise a sense of ethnically specific 'Gagauzness' in communication with the divine realm. Third, the performance of the texts of Gagauz religion is at the heart of the transmission and institutionalisation of lay practices. Finally, the power of religious institutional 'facts' to operate and move across institutional boundaries, between Church and lay spheres, is due to the power of the speech acts of human actors to draw on the agency of divine powers in the ways described above.

The examples given in this thesis have sought to demonstrate that religious facts generated by lay actors and institutions are often upheld and recognised, and also refuted, by monks, nuns and priests because they constitute an integral part of the phenomena of Gagauz religious reality and not something exterior or at variance with it. The divisions and tensions that appear to be present across the whole spectrum of religious practice do not follow the conventionally accepted and defined 'fault-lines' between 'true' or



institutional religion and 'folk' religion or between prayer and incantation, magic and religion, or canon and apocrypha and so on, but are contingent on historical and political contextual factors that mould attitudes and shape 'official' perspectives. Each of the language factors mentioned above are contingent on the unfolding historical events and processes that took place over the last 200 years, and are taking place today, in southern Bessarabia. Perhaps the clearest example of this are the translations of the *epistoliiyas* and their assimilation into a lay religious practice in the Gagauz language, which was contingent on factors such as the extension of literacy through education, the instrumentalisation of ethnic identities in inter-war Romania and the suppression of the Orthodox Church under socialist rule, to name but a few.

All in all, this thesis aims to draw attention to the micro-discourses and everyday episodes of 'folk' religious practice as a way of balancing the kind of totalising macro-discourses that instrumentalise religious, and ethnic, identities, in the construction of monolithic representations of religions and religious communities. In a European Christian context the dominance of these kinds of representations of 'folk' religion constructed in the interests of the nation or ecclesial authorities are acutely observable. This thesis explored these themes and issues from a particular theoretical and methodological perspective. Inevitably, important areas remain unexplored in this thesis. The Gagauz are part of a rich matrix of ethnic and linguistic groups in southern Bessarabia and comparative research on the relationship between national identities and religious practice amongst these groups may reveal fruitful new avenues to explore in the relationship between language, nationality and the institutions of lay religious practice.

## Appendix 1. Gagauz Liturgical and Canonical Material

### 1.1 Liturgical and Canonical Texts translated by Mihail Çakır into the Gagauz Idiom

*Kratkii Slaviano-Gagauzskii Molitvennik: Kısa dua kitabı: Slavânca (hem) Gagauzça*, Kishinev: Hristosun Doumasının Doorusaltanlı Kışnoflu Kardaşlın Tiparı, 1908.

*Evangelie Gagauzça Türkçä*, 1909.

*Liturgiia*, Kishinev: Pечатано в Kishinevskoi Eparhialnoi Tipografii, 1911.

*Sviashchennaia Istoriia Vetkhago zav'ta: Eski Baalantınun Ayozlari İstoriyası*, Kishinev: Eparhialnaya Tipografiya, 1911.

*Sviashchennaia Istoriia Novago Zaveta po Russki i Gagauzski (po Drevne-Tiuretski): Eni Baalantınun Ayozlarlı İstoriya Ruscha hem Gagauzcha (Eski-Türkchia)*, Kishinev: Eparhialnaya Tipografiya, 1912.

*Akafist: Djumledaniyoz Allahıdourana*, Kishinev, 1913.

*Ai (aiozlu) Evanghelieasâ hani Apostol Matfeidean eazâea ghecilmiş*, Gagauzlarân Popular Bibliotecasâ No. 1, Chişinău: Tipografia Eparhială – “Cartea Românească”, 1934.

*Ai (Aiozlu) Evangheliea Marcudan – Gagauzcea (eschi Tiurceea)*, Chişinău: Tipografia ‘Tiparul Moldovenesc’, 1935.

*Dua Chitabâ Gagauzlar için*, Chişinău: Tiparul Moldovenesc, 1935.

*Psaltir Găgăuzcea – (Tiurceea) Găgăuzlar için hem Tiurklear için*, Chişinău: Tiparul Moldovenesc, 1936.

*Eni baalantınun Ayozlari İstoriyası*, Kiev: Eyisözlük Monastırın “Örtmesi Dzhumledyanayöz Allahıduuduranın” Goloseevo, 2000 [edited reprint of the 1912 edition].

*Kısa dua kitabı Gagauzça*, Thesalonica: Ortodoksos Kipseli, 2001 [reprint based on the 1908 edition].

## 1.2 Editions of Gagauz Language Religious Journal *Hakikatın Sesi*

*Hakikatın (Dooruluun) Sesi: 6. Missionarlı yaprak*, Izдание Hristo-Rozhdestvenskago Bratstva, Chişinău: Tipographia Eparhială “Cartea Românească, [printed in Cyrillic].

*Hakikatın (Dooruluun) Sesi: 14. Missionarlı yaprak – Nazaretlülär için, eni çıkmış eretiklär için*, Izдание Hristo-Rozhdestvenskago Bratstva, Chişinău: Tipographia Eparhială “Cartea Românească, [printed in Cyrillic].

*Hakikatın (Dooruluun) Sesi: 15. Missionarlı yaprak – Eni çıkmış, enigelmış eretiklär için, bibliyalı studentlär için, hani laaplamerlar, denileerlar taa russellılar, millenistlär ekida binilliklar*, Izдание Hristo-Rozhdestvenskago Bratstva, Chişinău: Tipographia Eparhială “Cartea Românească, [printed in Cyrillic].

*Hahicatân (dooruluun) Sesi: 25. Misionarlâ eaprac – Aios Eni Dimitrinin Basarabovun Iomiuriu Eaşamasâ (Anâlâer Octombrieianân 27)*, Chişinău: Tipografia Uniunii Clericilor Ortodocşi din Basarabia, [printed in Latin script following Romanian orthographic rules].

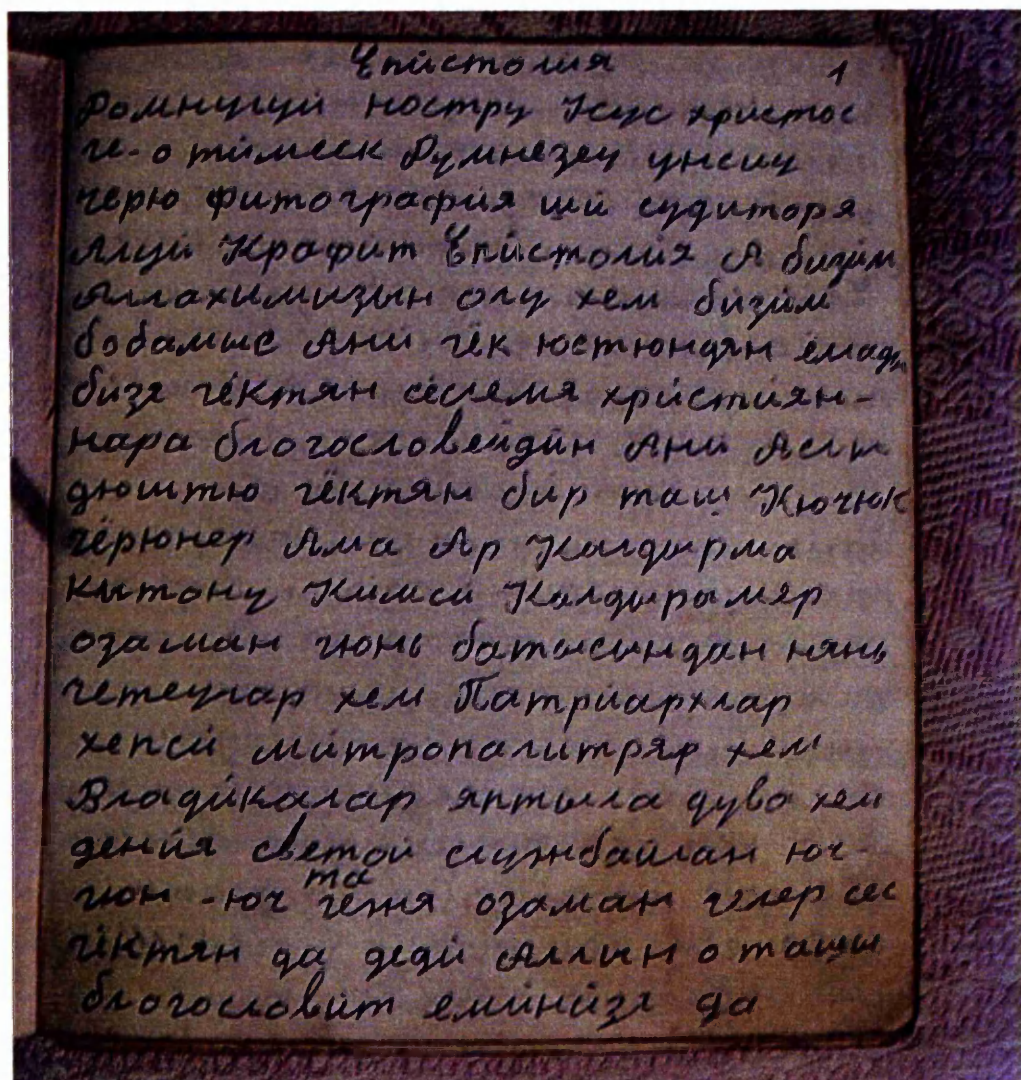
## 1.3 Bible Translations in the Gagauz Language

*Eni Testament*, (trans. B. Tukan), Kishinev: Paragon, 2003.

*Eni Baalantı; İi Haber İsus Hristos için*, (trans. S. Bayraktar), Moskva: Bibliyayı çeviren İnstitut, 2006.

## Appendix 2. Gagauz Epistoliyas

Text 1. Notebook of Rusu Vasilisa Vasilievna, born 1943, Beşgöz (Beşghioz)

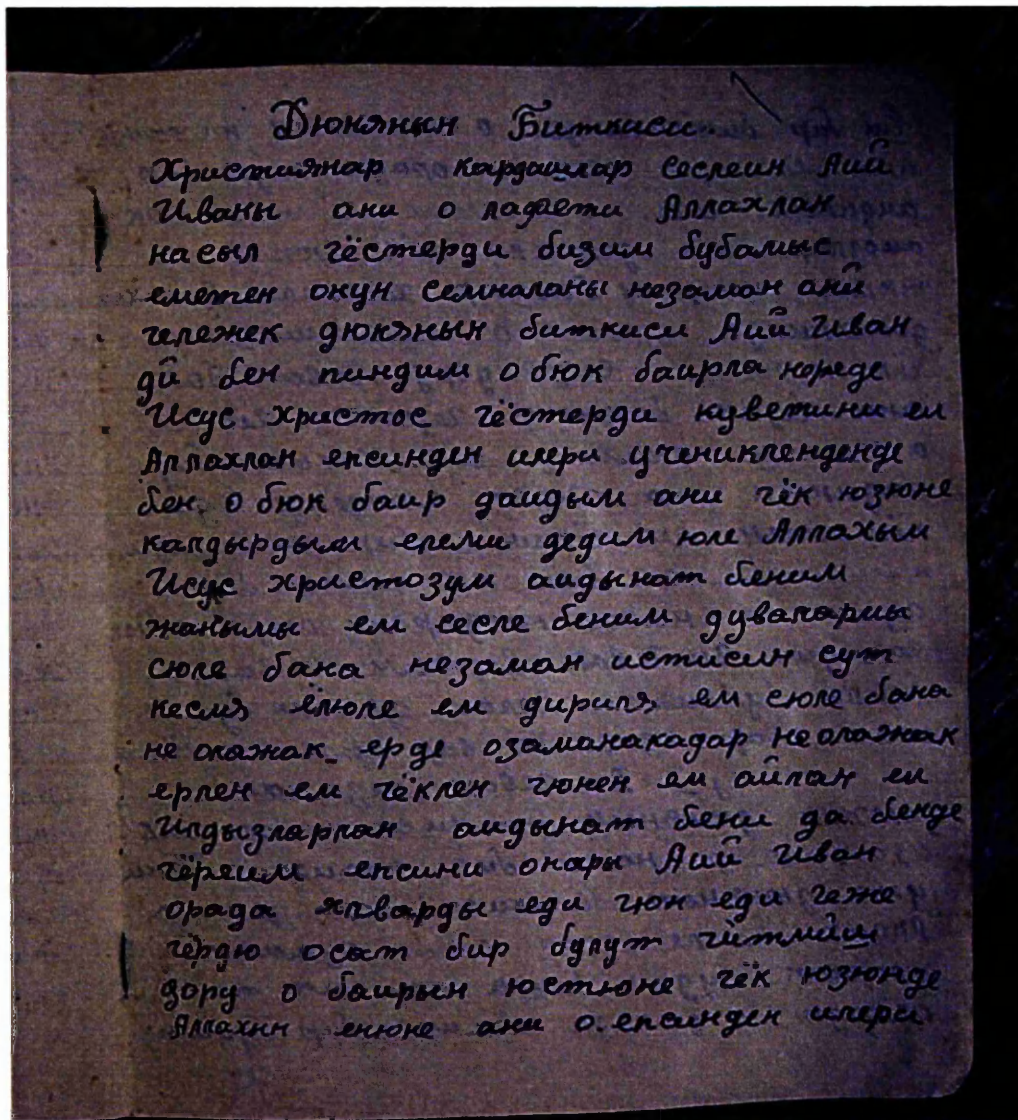


### Epistoliya

Domnului nostru Isus Hristos ce-o timesc Dumnezeu unsiu cerul fitografiya şi suditoriya a lui crafit Epistoliya A bizim Allahımızın olu hem bizim bobamız ani gök üstündän yolladı bizä göktän seslemä Hristianlara blogosloveidän Ani Aslı düştü göktän neän çetelar hem Patriarchlar hepsi mitropoliträr hem Vladikalar yaptıla duva hem deniya svetoi slujbaylan üç gün üç ta gecä ozaman gelir ses göktän da dedi Allın o taşı blogoslovit eminizä da



Text 2. Notebook of Hacıoglu Zina Georgieva, village of *Kurçu* (Vinogradovka, Odessa Oblast, Ukraine)

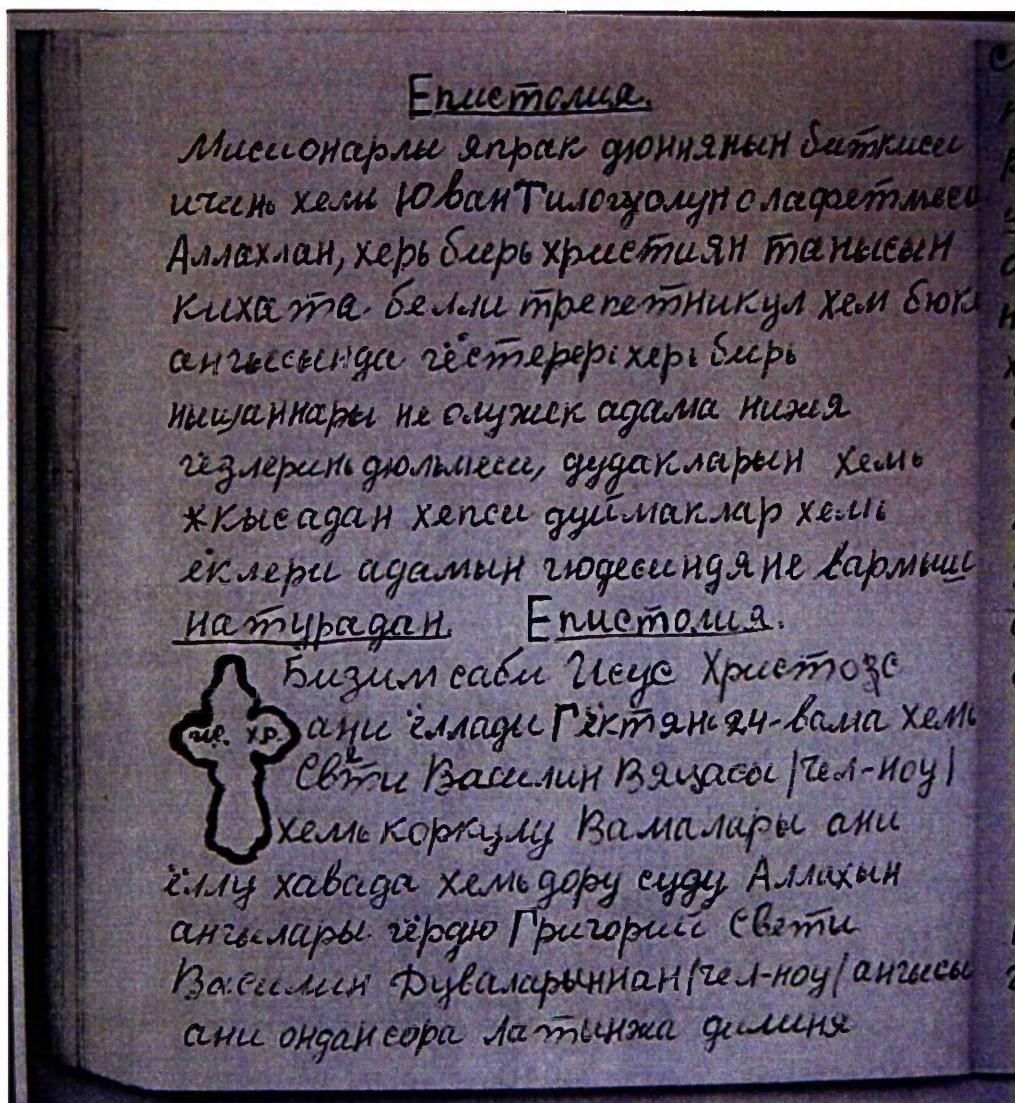


Dünyanın Bitkisi

Hristiyanar kardaşlar sesleyin Ayi vanı ani o lafeti Allahlan nasıl gösterdi bizim bubamız emeten onun semnaları nezaman ani gelecek dünyanın bitkisi Ayi van di ben pindim o bük bayırla nerede İsus Hristos gösterdi kuvetini em Allahlan ersinden ileri uçeniklendende ben o bük bayır daydım ani gök üzüne kaldırdım dedim üle Allahım İsus Hristozum aydınam benim canımı em sesle benim duvalarmı söyle bana nezaman istisin sut kesmä ölüle em dirilä em sole bana ne olacak erde ozamanakadar ne olacak erlen em göklen güneş em aylan em yıldızlarlan aydınat beni da bende göreyim epsini onarı Ayoş İvan orada yalvardı yedi gün yedi gece gördü o saat bir bulut gitmiş doru o bayırın üstüne gök üzünde Allahın enüne ani o epsinden ileri



Text 3.1 Notebook of Topchu Georgi Nikolaevich (dated 20 March 1997), village of Tomay (Tomai).



#### Epistoliya

Misionarli yaprak dünnyanın bitkisi için hem İvan Tilogolun o lafetmesi Allahlan, her bir Hristiyan tanısın kıyadı belli trepetnikul hem bük angısında gösterer her bir nişannarı ne olucek adama nică gözlerin dülmesi, dudakların hem kısıdan hepsi duymaklar hem ekleri adamın güdesindän varmış naturadan. Epistoliya.

Bizim sabi İsus Hristos ani yolladı Göktän 24-vama hem Sveti Vasilin Vyačası (cel noi) hem korkulu Vamaları ani öllu havada hem doru sudu Allahın angıları gördü Grigoriy Sveti Vasilin Duvalarınan (cel noi) angısı ani ondan sora latınca dilinä



Text 3.2 Notebook of Topchu Georgi Nikolaevich (dated 20 March 1997), village of Tomay (Tomai).

Стемашеск ромунеск-репасатулынтру  
 немутлуклан хемь севгили демнэмулсау  
 ромунеск сѣиница сарафайл протосингл  
 ши/да шинди типерит етланин  
 онбешинжи керэ хероирь ади хемь дорулуй-  
 нан хемь жанин фрайды хер бирхдеру  
 християн севгили окуйму дүннанын  
 биткиси озаманакадар не олушек  
 гёклэн ерлэн хемь гюннэн, айлан хемь  
 илдызларлан экышыкла гёрэ билли  
 хепесини буннары: Ишитъ саби  
 сенинь услу тыраны хемь ялварды орда  
 свети Иван, еди чонь едиде гехя хемь  
 гёрдю бирдэн бирь булут айдынык,  
 гелиркэн ондан яны хемь каплын о  
 булуду гётюрдю гёкя бобанын ёнюнэ  
 ани веклардэн илери биткисе  
 Пристолун ёнюнэ хемь бирь вакыт  
 гехя ёкмуш, хемь гёрдю саясасе  
 ынжарлери хемь гёкю донак херь

stemaşesc romunesc-repasatul întru nemutluk hem sevgili dem neamul sau romunesc  
 sfinția sarafail protosingl şi/da şindi tiperit etmiş onbeşinci kerä her bir adam hem  
 doruluynan hem canın faydalı her bir doru hristiyan sevgili okuycu dünnyanın bitkisi  
 ozamanakadar ne olucek göklän erlän hem gynnän, aylan hem yıldızlarlan yakışıkla  
 görä bilin hepsini bunnarı: İşit Sabi senin uslu çıranı hem yalvardı orda sveti İvan, yedi  
 gün yedida gecä hem gördü birdän bir bulut aydınnık, gelirkän ondan yanı hem kaplın o  
 buludu götürdü gökâ bobanın önünä ani veklardän ileri bitkisiz Pristolun önünä hem bir  
 vakit genä yokmuş, hem gördü saysız incerleri hem gökü donak her



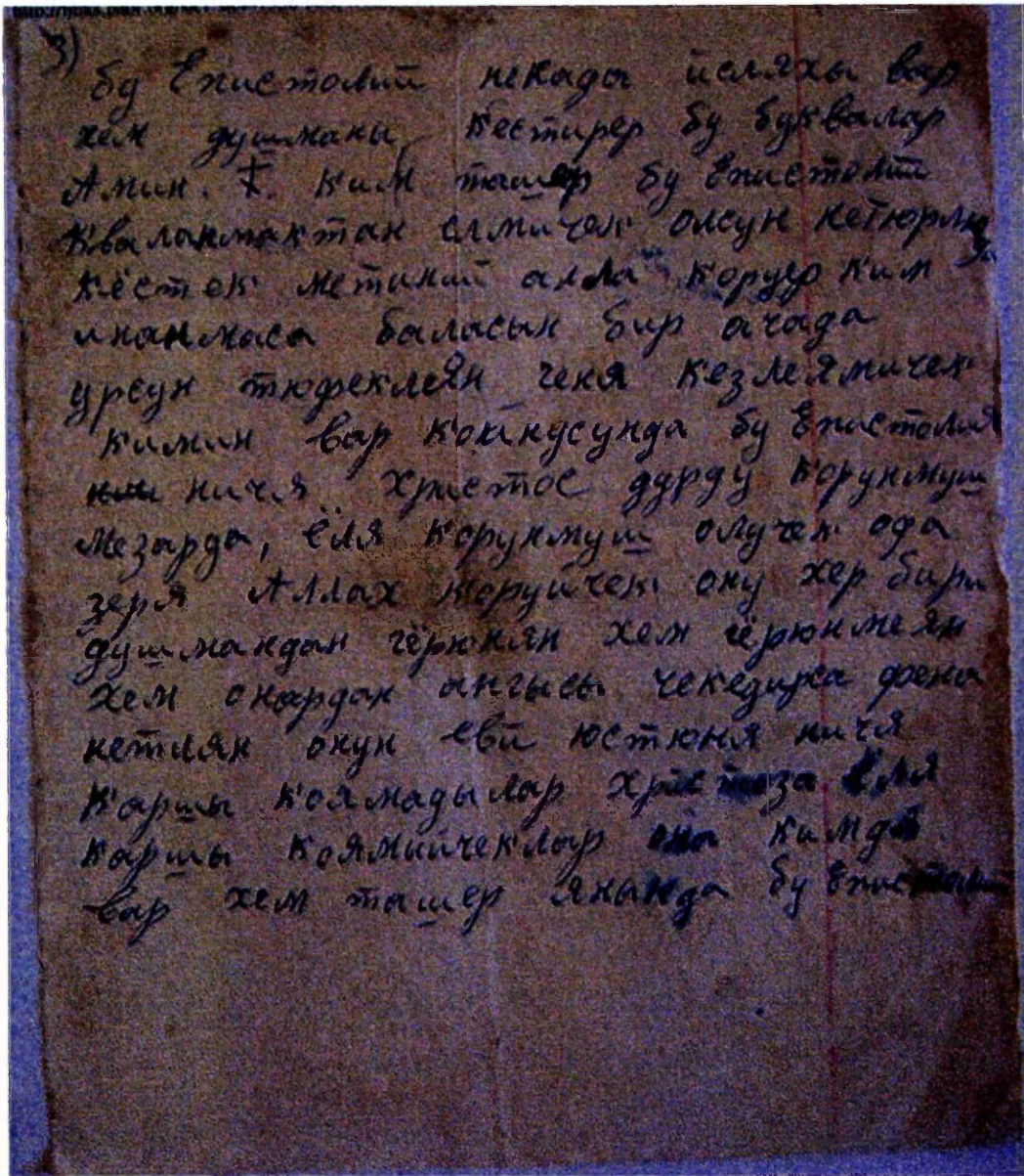
Text 3.3 Notebook of Topchu Georgi Nikolaevich (dated 20 March 1997), village of Tomay (Tomai).

Бир гержикликлән ынжгыр сеслери  
 метедерлар Аёз гөктеки Аллаһы  
 хам озаман ишити сес сеслә  
 дору Иван бакын есапал хем анна,  
 хем бакында гөрдю гөкю ачык  
 хем дуарды севгиле миярзана  
 капсу, севгиле християнна  
 сеслине Иван Тилогулу ангисе  
 лафети Аллаһлан хем нияистедю  
 гөктеки боба хепсини нияанна  
 дуннанын биткисини Свети Иван  
 дорунинди табор байларна нереда  
 Исус ани гөстерди куведини хем  
 Аллаһын кенди учениклериня  
 онюнда хем ния булунаркан  
 еллери лафетини бөля Сааби  
 Исусум Христозум якышыкла  
 сени сенин тарана; хем сеслә  
 бенин ялвармам, сөля бана

bir gerçekliklän inder sesledi metederlar Ayoз gökteki Allahı hem ozaman işiti ses seslä  
 doru İvan bakın esapal hem anna, hem bakındıda gördü gökü açık hem duyardı Sevgili  
 miryazna kapusu, sevgili Hristiyannar sesliin İvan Tilogolu angısı lefeti Allahlan hem  
 nicä istedi gökteki boba hepsini nişannarı dunnayanın bitkisini Sveti İvan der pindi tabor  
 bairlarına neredä İsus anı gösterdi kuvedini hem Allahlın kendi uçeniklerinä önündä  
 hem nicä bulunarkan ellerni lafetmiş bola Saabi İsum Hristozum yakışıkla beni senin  
 çarana; hem seslä benim yalvarmamı, sölä bana



Text 4. Notebook of Stoykov Feodor Feodorovich, village of Tomay.



3) Бү Епископий некадаг исләхы вар  
хем душманкы көстирер бу бугвалар  
Амин. †. Kim таһер бу Епископий  
кваланмактан олмиҗек. Олсун кетюрин  
көстөк метиний алла коруер ким  
инанмаса баласын бир ачада  
урсун түфәклән генә кезләмиҗек  
кимин вар коынусунда бу Епископий  
ниҗә Христос дурду корунмуш  
мезарда, өлә корунмуш олуҗек  
ода зерә Аллах коруҗек ону  
хер бири душмандан гөрүнән  
хем гөрүнмән хем онардан  
ангысы чекедирса фена  
нетлән онун евы үстүнә  
ниҗә каршы коамадилар  
Христога өлә каршы  
коаһмиҗеклар она кимдә  
вар хем таһер аһанда бу Епископий

Bu Epistoliy nekadar islāhı var hem duşmanı köstirer bu bukvalar Amin. †. Kim taşer bu Epistoliy kvalanmaktan ölmiçek. Olsun netürlüda köstek metiniy alla koruer kim inanmasa balasın bir açada ursun tüfeklän genä kezleämiçek kimin var koynusunda bu Epistoliä niçä Hristos durdu korunmuş mezarda, ölä korunmuş oluçek oda zerä Allah koruyçek onu her biri duşmandan gөрүнән hem gөрүнmeän hem onardan anğısı çekedirsa fena netlän onun evy üstünä niçä karşı koāmadılar Hristoza ölä karşı koāmiyçeklar ona kimdä var hem taşer ānında bu Epistoliy

### Appendix 3. Gagauz Charm and Exorcism Texts

Text 1. Kuru Domniku İvanovna, born 1941, village of *Gaidar*, recorded 09.06.04.

Maavi gözlüdän nazarlandıysaydı,  
Maavi gözlüdän nazarlandıysaydı,  
Nazar çatlasın.  
Eşil gözlüdän nazarlandıysaydı,  
Nazar çatlasın.  
Kırmızı gözlüdän nazarlandıysaydı,  
Nazar çatlasın.  
Sarı gözlüdän nazarlandıysaydı,  
Nazar çatlasın.  
Adamdan nazarlandıysaydı,  
Ayıp eri çatlasın.  
Kaardan nazarlandıysaydı,  
Memesi çatlasın.  
Bu en büyük betvasi.

Text 2. Çakir Elena, born 1941, village of *Beşalma*, recorded 08.06.04.

Bobanın hem Oolun hem Ayoş Duhun adına.  
Kuşçaaz, Kuşçaaz,  
Gözündä duudun,  
Gözündä büüdün,  
Yukarda uçardın,  
Kanatçıklarını zihir alardı.  
Aaça damnadı, aaç yarıldı,  
Taşa damnadı, taş yarıdı.  
Kim nazarladıseydi İvankacık?  
[...] İvankacık vatizli.  
Herbir ekinden, herbir kemiinä,  
Allahtan, Panaiyadan imdat!

Text 3. Dragoş Anna Vasilievna, born 1961, village of *Avdarma*, recorded 11.02.06.

Çekettim bir uzak yola,  
Karşı geldim büyük samkeylan,  
Küçük samkeylän,  
Samka, samkasına,  
Samka moldovanka,  
Samka ruska,  
Samka nemtiokalan,  
Samka latışkiylan,

Samka amerikankıylan,  
 Samka italiankılıylan,  
 Samka grețianka,  
 Samka turkçanka,  
 Samka uzbečka.  
 (Nekadar dünnedä var dil herkezin söliysin, bitkidä siz greksiniz mi yoksa türksünüz mü  
 .....bitkidä onnun söliysiniz dilinnä. Bitkidä grek, samka geklän)  
 Güüsümdän tuttu,  
 Erä urdu,  
 Gözlerimi karartı,  
 Suratımı sararttı.  
 Kimse görmedi, kimse işitmedi,  
 Sadeçim sän Panaiyacım,  
 Ray kaplandan gördün da dedin:  
 - Nedän Ana uymersin?  
 Nedän vaykarartaltıysın?<sup>531</sup>  
 Nicä Panaiyacım.  
 Çekettim bir uzak yola,  
 Karşı geldim büyük samkeylan,  
 Küçük samkeylän,  
 Güüsümdän tuttu,  
 Erä urdu,  
 Gözlerimi karartı,  
 Suratımı sararttı.  
 Kimse görmedi, kimse işitmedi,  
 Sadeçim sän Panaiyacım,  
 Ray kaplandan gördün da dedin:  
 - Söz Ana aalama,  
 Bän seni elindän alacam,  
 (Okuyan kişiyi, Tanya okarsaydı)  
 Tatianaya getirecäm.  
 Tanya okuyacak nicä elinän alacak,  
 Kalacan sän da pak nicä Allah braamış,  
 Anası da yaratmış,  
 Bendän okuması,  
 Allahtan da ilacı.

Text 4. Kapsomun Kristina Stepanovna, born 1944, village of *Avdarma*, 11.02.06.

İisus Hristos çeketmiş bir uzun yola gitmää,  
 O uzun yola gidärkän etişmiş bir büyük bayıra,  
 O büyük bayırı geçtiynän etişmiş bir büyük çayıra,  
 O büyük çayırın içindä, İerusalimin çayırında,  
 İisus Hristos yapmış bir büyük pınar.

<sup>531</sup> Unintelligible word. Another woman from the same village who is familiar with this *okumak* suggested that here the words *raatlanmıysın*, *raatsız oliysin* or *dinnenmersin* would usually appear.

O büyük pınarın dolayında yapmış dokuz holluk,  
Dokuzunu da suylan doldurmuş,  
Dübüdüz küüylerä da haber yollamış,  
Toplaştı hepsicii nazarlılar, dertlilär, acılılar,  
Kimin ne hastalı varmış, hepsicii gelmişlär.  
Da İerusalimin çayırında, Ay Yordanın suyunda,  
Eşil çibritacıklan yıkanmışlar.  
Da nicä saamışlar, genä ölä saa olmuşlar.  
- hastanın adını söyleersin.  
Da o da saa, pak kalmış.

Text 5. Kristova Evdokiya Feoderovna, born 1930, village of *Avdarma*, recorded 11.02.06.

İsus Hristos pinmiş Eleonin bayırına,  
İnmiş sora İerusalemın çayırına,  
İerusalemın çayırında yapmış bir pınar.  
Dokuz holluk blagoslovit etmiş Yordan Ayazmasınnan.  
Hepsinä hastaları çaarmış,  
İkansın, paklansın.  
Hepsi gelmiş, ikanmış, paklanmış,  
Angısı görememiş, görmüş, gitmiş,  
Angısı işitmemiş, işitmiş, gitmiş,  
Angısı hastaymış, doorulmuş, gitmiş,  
Angısın barsaa acarmış, alışmış, gitmiş,  
Angısın arkaları, alışmış, gitmiş,  
Angısın sancisi varmış, alışmış, gitmiş,  
Hepsini İsus Hristos blagoslovit etmiş.  
Hepsini alışmış, gitmiş.  
Dä çeketmiş gitmää uzun yola,  
Etişmiş bir büyük köprüyä,  
Büük köprün altında fenalık oturmuş.  
Kimsey da orada.  
Korkmuş pek.  
İsus Hristos baarmış.  
Kimsey işitmemiş, çirmiş, baarmış.  
Bojemateri işitmiş,  
O ona demiş:  
- Gidesin filan kariya,  
Okusun seni.  
Da, Nicä Dunyaya gitsin okusun seni -.  
Aazçaazınan sülesin elcezleni,  
Suvazlasın seni.  
Taman Dunya çeketmiş söylemää,  
Suvazlamaa.  
Srazu Isus Hristos gelmiş bıcacıınan, nacacıınan, tırmıcanan.  
Bıcaklan kesmiş, nacanana kıymış, tırmıcanan çekmiş.  
Herbir damarından,

Herbir kemindän çıkarmış,  
Herbir hastalı başlından aldı.  
Hererdän götürmüş, akmış.  
Kara denizä gitmiş, saylêrlan, sularlan,  
Daalara,  
Taşlara,  
Pustiyarlara,  
- Tâ böla...-  
Amin.

Text 6. Dragoş Anna Vasilievna, born 1961, village of *Avdarma*, recorded 11.02.06.

Çekettim bir uzak yola,  
Karşı geldim büyük korkuylan,  
Küçük korkuylan,  
Korkunun korkusundan.  
Güüdesindän tuttu, erä urdu,  
Gözlerimi peydeletti,  
Suratimi sararttı.  
Kimse görmedi, kimse işitmedi,  
Sadeçim sän Panaiyacım,  
Ray kaplandan gördün da dedin:  
- Nedän – (adınız nasıl?)  
Nedän Ana uymersin,  
Nedän vaykaratalıysın<sup>532</sup>  
Nicä Panaiyacım uyuyım.  
Çekettim bir uzak yola,  
Karşı geldim büyük korkuylan,  
Küçük korkuylan,  
Korkunun korkusundan.  
Güüdesindän tuttu, erä urdu,  
Gözlerimi peydeleti,  
Suratimi sararttı.  
Kimse görmedi, kimse işitmedi,  
Sadeçim sän Panaiyaçım,  
Ray kaplanda gördün da dedin:  
- Sus Nikolaya aalama,  
Bän senin elindän tutacam,  
Anaya getirecäm,  
Ana okuyacak nicä elinän alacak,  
Kalacan sän da pak nicä Allah braamış,  
Anası da yaratmış.  
Bendän okuması,  
Allahtan da ilaçı

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<sup>532</sup> See note 1.

Text 7. Varvara *bulü*, village of *Beşgöz*, recorded 18.02.06.

Panaiyanın pak, İsusun pak yola,  
Panaiyanın pak ileri,  
Allahtan imdatın olsun!  
Vavaratan okuman olsun!  
Oniki angel,  
İsusun önündä divan durêr,  
- Tâ onnun adına - olsun,  
Onun güüdesi paklansın,  
Allahtan imdatın!  
Gena Varvaratan okuman olsun!  
- Tâ bu kadar -  
Üç kızkardeş,  
Biri durêr, biri gülêr,  
Üç kızkardeş,  
Biri aalêr, biri gülêr,  
Allahtan imdatın olsun!  
Varvaratan okuman olsun!  
- Tâ ölä -  
Dermenä gittim, dermenci yok,  
Kazan çiviz yok,  
On iki çiviz arasında,  
- Tâ o adamı -  
Dermenä görmerim.  
Allahtan imdatın olsun!  
Varvaratan okuman olsun!  
Tâ Panaiyanın pak ileri, İsusun pak yola,  
İsusun pak yolunda, onu deer paklansın  
Allahtan imdatın olsun!  
Varvaranın okuman olsun!  
Oniki angel,  
İsusun önündä divan durêr.  
Tâ o canın güüdesi paklansın.  
Allahtan imdatın olsun!  
Varvaratan okuman olsun!  
Üç kızkardeş,  
Biri gülêr, biri aalêr, biri sevinêr.  
Göktä yıldızlar,  
Allahtan imdatın olsun!  
Varvaranın okuman olsun!  
Üç kızkardeş,  
Biri gülêr, biri aalêr, biri sevinêr. .  
Göktä yıldızlar,  
Allahtan imdatın olsun!  
Varvaranın okuman olsun!  
Dermenä gittim, dermenci yok,  
Kazan çiviz yok,

On iki çiviz arasında,  
- Tã o canın adını -  
Dermenã görmerim,  
Allahtan imdatın olsun!  
Varvaranın okuman olsun!  
Göktã, şafka, yerdã,  
Petri güüdensindãn paklansın  
Allahtan imdatın olsun!  
Varvaranın okuman olsun!  
Üç kızkardeş,  
Biri gülêr, biri aalêr, biri sevinêr,  
Göktã, şafka, yerdã,  
Petri güüdensindãn paklansın  
Allahtan imdatın olsun!  
Varvaranın okuman olsun!  
Üç kızkardeş,  
Biri gülêr, biri aalêr, biri sevinêr,  
Göktã, safkta, erdã,  
Petri güüdesini paklansın!  
Allahtan imdatın olsun!  
Varvaranın okuman olsun!

Text 8.1 Exorcism and malediction text from the *tetradka* belonging to Konstandoglo (Çoban) Maria, village of Tomay.

2. ci. Ківадарія, 3. цю солімонія  
4. цю. сіліна, 5. цю. лінікожда, 6. цю.  
авізуха, 7. цю. скаріміа, 8. цю. міха,  
9. цю. жулепіа, 10. цю. гріпа, 11. цю.  
сауа, 12. цю. аумах вуца, 13. цю. отауа,  
14. цю. хібіа 15. цю. хуба, 16. цю.  
зіона, 17. цю. глюбіа, 18. цю. ісправа,  
19. цю. тіхана; Хем нердѣ вардѣ атла-  
рым бєіім. язым хем гюдѣм якѣм,  
бѣн о евъ якѣм амерѣм некадар 70 іш  
хотар ер. Озаман дєді она Брханмє.  
Міхал тѣ, дерім хем сєілерім сана,  
хем балаерѣм. Саабі Аллах Ісус Хрісто  
зун адѣман. Аллахлан олмасѣм куведѣм  
якѣм амаа кеміклєрнѣ Аллахлан чїра-  
нын (Маріанын) хем ушакларнѣ онун.  
(Атларѣ) нєдѣ хаївакарнѣ, нєдѣ казанца-  
їна; анѣларнѣ. Аллах вердѣ, дер. гідѣсѣм.  
Байрлара пустіахлѣм, нєрдѣ інсан яшамѣм  
ер, хем хороз ѣтмєр анѣ орѣм ерлєм ѣсѣм  
откїсїс; хем генѣ емін едерім бїзїм  
Сабїнѣ. Ісус Хрістозун хем онун пєк пак  
Анасїнѣ анѣ даїма кїс Марїа, хем  
Іван Ваатїз едїсїлѣм хем о 12. апостолѣ

2. ci. navadariya, 3. cü solimoniya, 4. cü. Silina, 5. ci linikocda, 6. ci. Avizuha, 7. ci skarmila, 8. ci. gripa, 11, ci, sauua, 12. ci, aumahvuşa, 13. cü otaua, 14. Cü hibiba 15. ci huba, 16. ci ziona, 17. Ci gluoina, 18. Ci isprava, 19. Cu tihana; hen nerdä var bu atlarım benim yazılı hem güdäm yapılı bän o evä yaklaşamerım nekadar 70 iş hotar er: Ozaman dedi ona Arhangel Mihail tä, derim hem sölerim sana, hem balaerım. Saabi Allah İsus Hristosum adınan Allahlan olmasın kuvedin yaklaşmaa kemiklernä Allahın çıranın (Mariyanın) hem yaşmaklarna onun (Atları) neda haivanarna, neda kazancına; angılarını Allah verdi, der gidesin bairlara pustiyayalda, nerdä insan yaşmaer, hem horoz ötmer ani orda erleşäsin bitkisis; hem genä emin ederim bizim Sabinin İsus Hristozun hem onun pek pak Anasının ani daima kıs Mariya, hem İvan Vaatiz edicilän hem o 12. apostolan



Text 9.2 Exorcism and malediction text from the *tetradka* belonging to Konstandoglo (Çoban) Maria, village of Tomay.

хем 12. пророклан хем 3. Архереи бююк  
Свети Васил. Григори Блогослов. хем Иван  
алтын аазлы, матвеи, Лука, марка хем  
Иован 46 евангелиялан, онарлан ани 318  
попоз. дела мира ликиа) хем Аюз Свети  
Георгиан хем Свети Димитри архереи Свети  
Никulai; Феодур, Стратилат, хем Иван  
ени suçавадан; хем хепсинян, Аюзларлан  
Кувиря ши Муçеничаларлан хем уçеникләр-  
лан хем хем хепсинян аюзларын: шинди  
хем хожема хем даймаларын даймалары  
надан Амин ✠.  
Иисус Христозун адынан: Ангисы патимаш  
оладу тaa ёлюмюнә кадар, нек илик  
чи Аллахын измекары ичин (Марья) чика  
рсын хем алыштырсын, гудемим хаста-  
лындын да бaaшласын салык: хем проет  
етсин гюнааларым, хер керә шинди хем  
хожема хем даймаларын даймалары-  
надан Амин ✠. Бетвалар Архангел  
Михайл Сатананын юстюна; ✠, Кысма,  
ичин бетваларын сені фәналыкларын  
чекетмеси хем кетюсю: хем дур гудуцу  
феналык, бетваларын сені хем сибидилма  
инсан куланмасын, хем юкәрдан

hem 12. Proroklar hem 3, Arherei büük Sveti Vasil Grigori Blogoslov hem İvan altın aazlı, Matvei, Luka, Marka hem İovan 46 evangeliyalan, onarlan ani 318 popaz dela mira likiya hem Ayozy Sveti Georgilän hem Sveti Dimitri arherei Sveti Nikulai; Feodur, Stratilat, hem İvan eni suçavadan; hem hepsinän, Ayozlarlan Kuvirä ši Muçeniçalarlan hem uçeniklärlän hem hem hepsinän ayozların: şindi hem hojma hem daimaların daimalarınadan Amin.

İsus Hristozun adınan; Angısı patimaş oldu taa ölümünä kadar, pek ilikçi Allahın izmekäri için (Maria) çikarsın hem alıştırın, güdemim hastalımdan da baaştırsın salık: hem prost etsin günaalarımı, her kerä şindi hem hojma hem daimaların daimalarınadan Amin. Betvalar Arhangel Mihail Satanın üstünä; kısma için betvalarım seni fänalıkların çeketmesi hem kötüsü hem dur guducu fenalık betvalarım seni hem sibidılma insan kulanmasından, hem yukardan

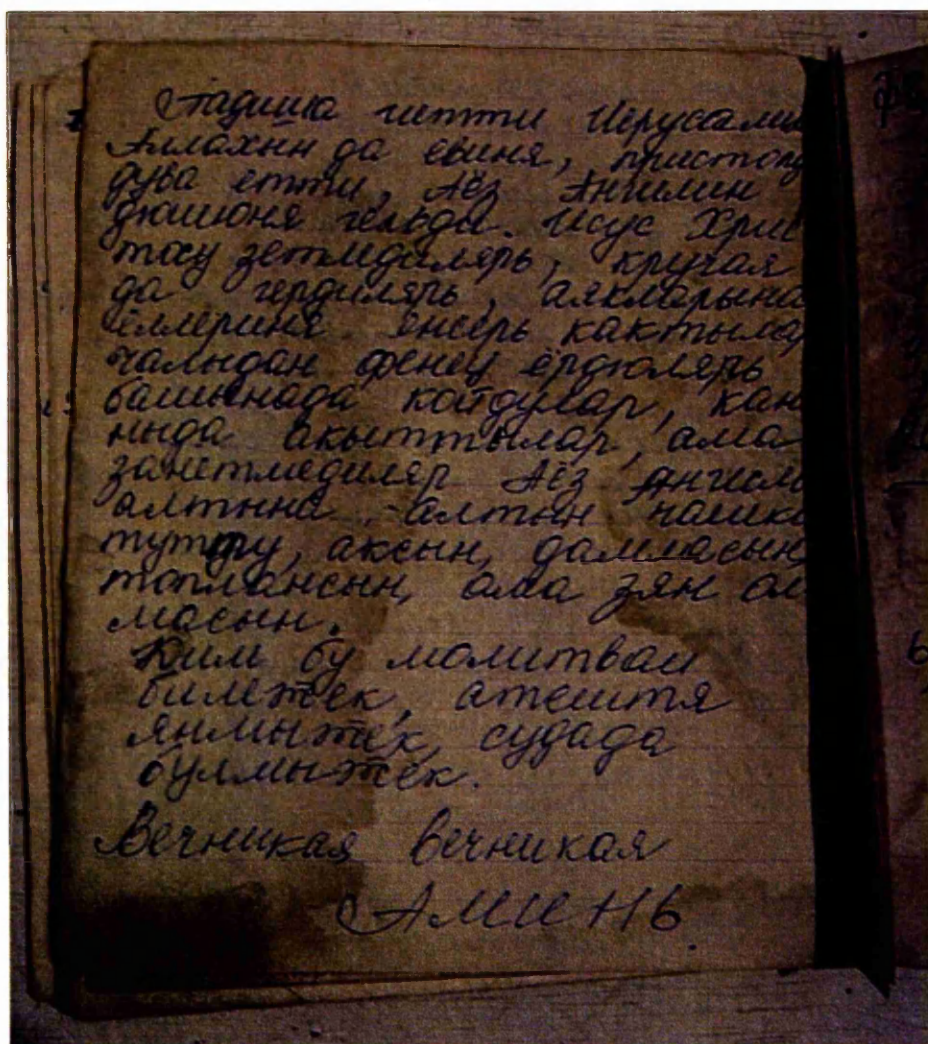
#### Appendix 4. – ‘Archaic’ Prayers in the Gagauz Idiom

Text 1. Çakir Elena, born 1941, village of *Beşalma*, recorded 8<sup>th</sup> June 2004

Umudum var Allahmız göktä,  
kurtaracamız var İsus Hristosumuz göktä,  
koruyucum var Allahın anası göktä.  
Üç aaççaaz, Allah, Oolu, Ayoz Duhu.  
Koruyucum benim var Allahın anası göktä.  
Sevgim Cumaa iki kat olmuş dizçä durer,  
Bizim için yalvarêr.  
Hiç kimseyi görmeer, hiç kimseyi işitmeer,  
Sade üç kızkardeşları Lazarın  
Görmüşlär, işitmişlär,  
Biri Marta, biri Mariya, biri Magdalena.  
Bayırlar üstündä gezärmişlär,  
çiçek toplarmışlar, rayı düzmää,  
mumnar hem yıldızlar tutuştu, ray açıldı.  
Sevgili Cumaa durdu dedi,  
- Kim benim bu duamı bilecek hem söylecek,  
perşembä günü avşamnän beş kerä,  
cumaa günü sabaalän altı kerä,  
gelecek Ayoz incer, götürececek dinnenmää,  
bal mumundan slemgeye, Avramın kucaana,  
İsaan, İakovun-, Amin.

Text 2. Radiş Vasilisa Vasilevna, born 1939, village of *Kazayak*.

Padişaa gitti İerusalimä  
Allahın da evinä, pristada  
Duva etti, Ayoz Angilin  
Dünneyä geldi. İsus Hristosu  
Zeetledilär, kruçaya da  
Gerdilär, ayaklarına  
Ellerinä enser kaktılar  
Çalıdan fenet ördülär  
Başına da koydular, kanını da  
Akıttılar, ama zanetmedilär.  
Ayoz Angeli altına altın çaşka  
Tuttu, aksın, damnasın,  
Toplansın, ama zän olmasın.  
Kim bu molitvayı  
Bilecek, ateştä  
Yanmayacak, suda da  
Buulmıcek.  
Veçnikaya, veçnikaya,  
Amin.



The page from Radiş Vasilisa Vasilevna's *tetradka* with the above prayer.

Text 3. İngiliz Mariya Petrovna. born 1944, village of *Beşalma*, recorded 8th June 2004.

Bu düş Panaiyanın düşü.  
 Panaiya açan uyumuş Eleon bayrında,  
 Görmüş İerusalimda,  
 Gerili kresttä Oolu,  
 Bizim Allahımızı İsus Hristosu.  
 Piotr Rumda, Paval Damaskimda.  
 Açan uyumuş uykusunda,  
 Görmüş panaiyayı,  
 - Oo anam, benim anam,  
 Pek sevgilim anam,  
 Açan sän uyudun,  
 Ney gördün senin düşün?

- Oolum, benim oolum,  
Ben seni gördüm,  
Gerili Kresttä  
İki razboyun arasında.  
Seni tutmuşlar,  
Diri baalamışlar,  
Senin üzünä tükürmüşlər,  
Sana fena laflar söylemişlər,  
Senin başına çalidan,  
Feneç koymuşlar.  
Seni Pilada suda vermişlər,  
Ellerini hem ayaklarını,  
enserlän kresta kakmuşlar.  
Bir dä razboynik süngüylän,  
Saplamış senin saa tarafını.  
Akmuş ondan kan hem su,  
Kan komka için,  
Su da vatizlik için.  
Yutlenim [?] doymuşlar,  
Sirkeylän aazına.  
Sän dä benim oolum öldü krestta.  
İosif hem Nikor  
İndirdilər seni kresttän.  
Kolverdilär seni eni mezara.  
Sän da şimdi gitirdi Oolum İosifä,  
Da getir bizä sevinmelik,  
Angillär dä okuyeceklar:  
- Hristos dirildi ölümdän,  
Bizä sevinmelik getirdi  
Otur Bobanın saa tarafında,  
- Anam benim anam  
Pek sevgili anam  
Hepsi senin düşün dooru.  
Hepsini bän onnarı geçercäm  
[...] kurtarmak için  
Kim dayanacak düşünä Panaiyanın  
Da verecek onu evdän evä,  
O adamın olacak saalı da islääli.  
Kim da yazacak Panaiyan düşünü,  
Koruyacak onu pak evdä.  
O evdä dinnenecek Duh Svätoy,  
Allahın de angili koruyacak  
O adami her bir fena erdän,  
Ölümdän da, ansız ölümdän da,  
Ateşten da, kılıçtan da,  
Gök çakmasından da, toludan da,  
Sudan, herbir fena erdän.  
Kim da gicek suda,

Olcek onun yanında Panaiyanın düşü.  
Gidecek geeri kurtulmuş kabaatı için.  
Kim dâ gicek steanoz almaa,  
Onun da yanında olcek Panaiyanın düşü.  
Dönecek geeri saalıklan hem şen.  
Karı, ani küçük uşaklan lufusa olacek  
Onun da yanında olacek Panaiyanın düşü.  
Olacak saalı hem islää adamı da.  
Da nekadar çok günaası olsun,  
Açan adam yalvaracak Allaha  
Bütün üreklän,  
Allah prost edecek o adamı.  
Bän dâ görüncän  
O adama can bir verirkänä.  
Ahrangel Mikhail da  
Olacak o adamın canını  
De götürececek benim gökümä,  
Avrama hem İakova,  
Da şennenenecek  
Orada hepsinnän doorulaa benim gökümdä.  
Yalvarın sade Panaiyaya  
İsus Hristos senin zeetin için,  
Hem senin kanın için,  
Ani döktün bizim için,  
Günahlarımızı için.  
Prost et bizi prorok Ivan krestitel,  
İsus Hristos kurtar bizi herbir fena erdän.  
Amin.

Text 4. Kristova Evdokiya Feoderovna, born 1930, village of *Avdarma*, recorded on 11.02.06

Varmış bir büyük adam,  
Almış o bir büyük nacak,  
Gitmiş o bir büyük daaya,  
Kesmiş o bir büyük aaç,  
Yapmış o bir büyük monastir,  
Yapmış dokuz kuplan,  
Dokuz da pristollan.  
Bir da oturêrmış Maica Maria,  
Bir da oturêrmış İvan Hrestitel.  
Maica Maria oturarmış hem iki tarafa bakınarmış.  
- İvan Krestitel görmedin mi ooluçaazımı hem dâ senin kumiciini?  
- Maica Maria görmedim bän,  
ama işitim, ani Karagan bayırında  
Kruçaya geriliymiş,  
Ellerinä, bacaklarına inser kakmışlar,



Başına çalı fenet giydirmişlər.

Maica Maria açan işitmiş kalkı da çeketti kaçmaa,

Karşı gelii kurbaanan

Kurbaacık sorêr:

- Maica Mariya neçin sän o kaa pek alersin.

- Ey, kurbaa, kurbaa benim oolçaazım

Kalagan bayırında kruça da gerili,

Ellerinä, bacaklarına inser kakmışlar,

Başına çalı fenet giydirmişlər.

- Maica Mariya bendä dä vardı dokuz yavruciim,

Geçti bir taliga da hepsini çiinedi, hepsi öldü,

Da bän o kaa pek aalamadım.

Neçin sän o pek aalıysın?

- Ey, Kurbaacık, kurbaacık, her keret gez,

Er altından, er üzündä,

Her bir pınarlara girersin,

Her keret olarsın pak,

Ne kurtlanarsın, ne korkarsın.

Kaçı, kaçı Maica Maria gelii karşı İsus Hristoslän,

Sölii: – Ey, oolçaazım, neçin sän o kaa pek koydun kendini zeetä?

- Ey, Sffnt annam, bän koymadım ne senin için,

Ne benim için, ne gökteki Boba için.

Bän koydum dübtüdüz dünnää için.

İnek bızaalardı, bızaasını almardı,

Koyun kuzulardı, kuzusunu almardı,

Genç insan evlenerdi, styönozluk yoktu,

Uşak duuvardı, vaatizlik yoktu,

Ölerdi insan, prohot yoktu.

A, bän sa ölä yaptım ani inek alacak bızaasını,

Koyun alacak kuzusunu,

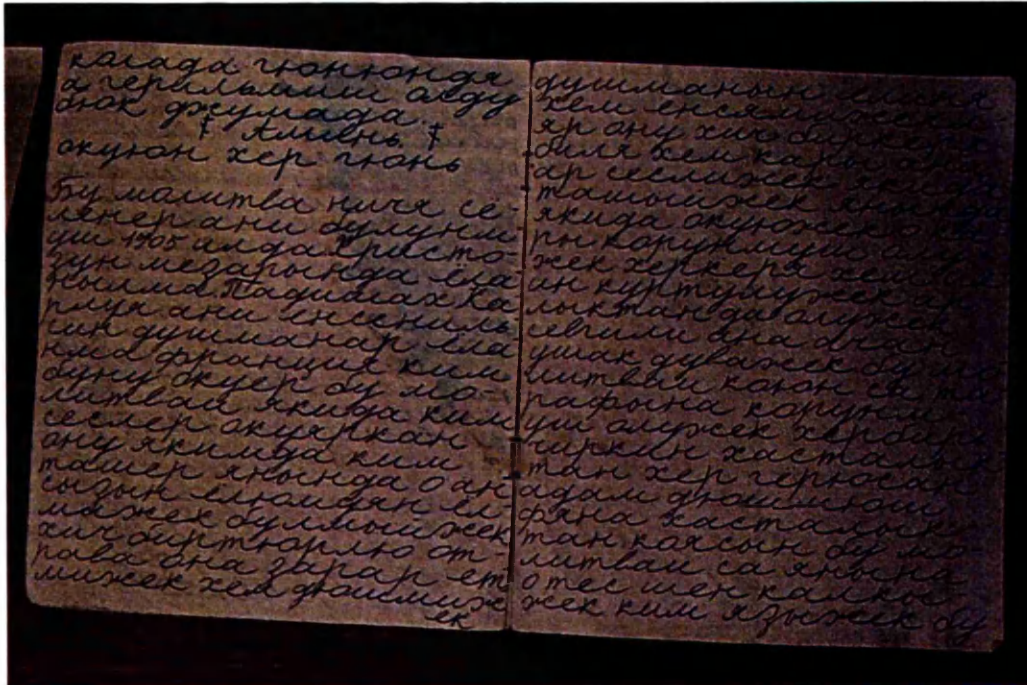
Gençlär kabledeceklär stenozluk,

Uşak kabledecek vaatizlik,

Ihtär can, ani öldü o da prohot kabledecek.

Amin.

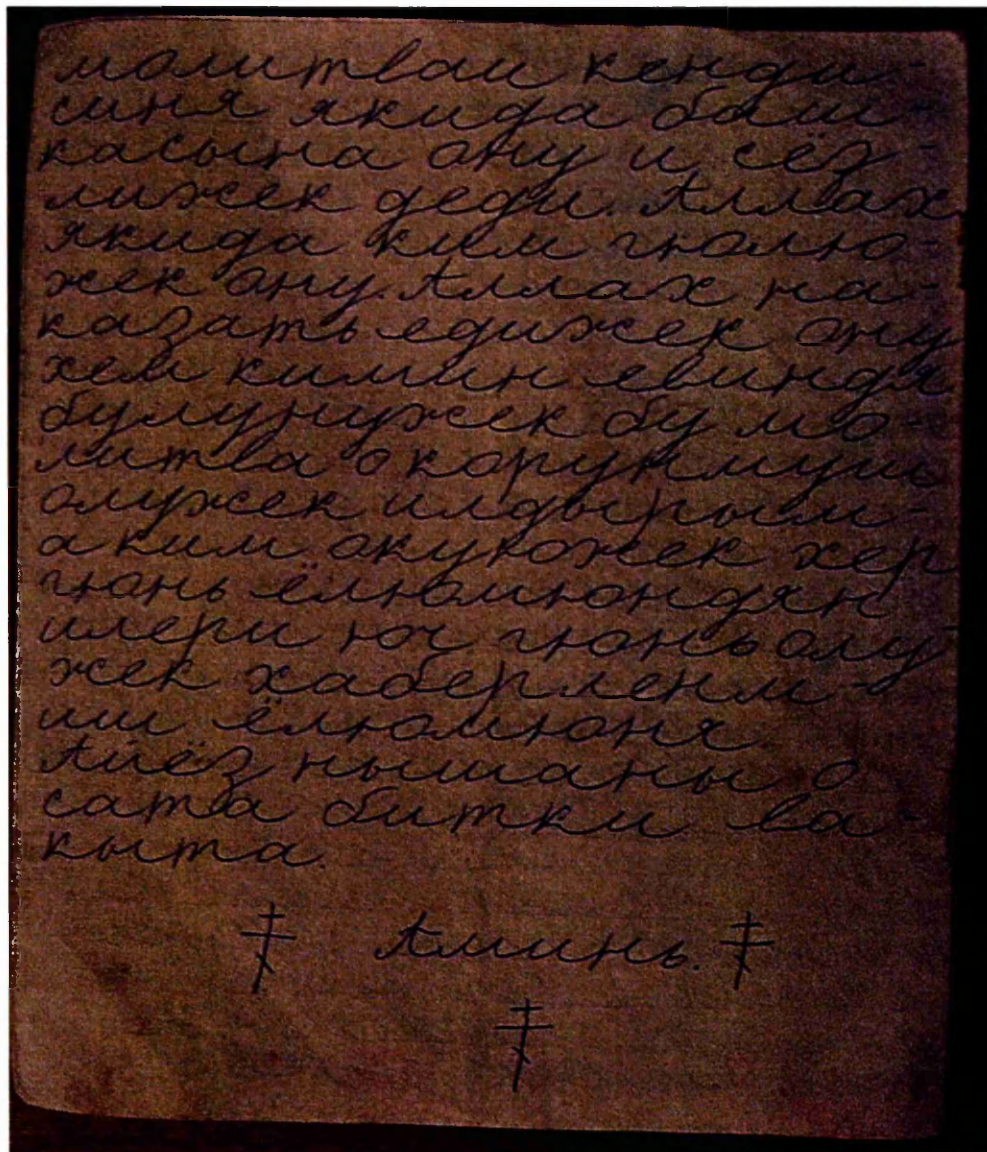
Text 5.1 Notebook of Radiş Vasilisa Vasilevna, village of *Kazayak* (Cazaclia).



Bu molitva nică sölenir ani bulunmuş 1905 yılda Hristozun mezarında yolaniılma Padişah Karluya ani ensenilsin düşmannar yolaniıma franţiya.<sup>533</sup> Kim bunu okuyêr bu molitvayı yâkidâ kim sesler okuyarkan onu yakimda kim taşêr yanında o ansızın ölmeyecek bulmayacak hiç birtürlü otrava ona zarar etmiyecek hem düşmeyecek düşmanın elinâ hem *ensäme*yeceklâr onu hiç bir kerâ bilâ hem karı ani aar sesleyecek yâkidâ taşıyacak yanında yâkidâ okuyacak o karı korunmuş olacek herkerâ hem iilin kurtulucek aarlıktan da olacek sevgili ana açan uşak *duıy*ecek bu molitvyı *koyun* saa tarafına korunmuş olacek herbir çirkin hastalıktan. Eer görürsân adam düşmüş *fena* hastalıktan *koyasın* bu molitvayı saa yanına o tez şen kalkıcek kim yazıcek bu

<sup>533</sup> The meaning of this sentence is unclear but in all probability it should be read, 'This prayer, as it is said, was found in 1905 in the tomb of Christ and was sent to the Emporer Karl so that he might defeat his enemies the French.'

Text 5.2 Notebook of Radiş Vasilisa Vasilevna, village of *Kazayak* (Cazaclia).



molitvai kendisinä yäkidä başkasına onu ii sözleyecek dedi Allah yäkidä kim gülücek onu Allah nakazat edicek onu hem kimin evindä bulunucek bu molitva o korunmuş olacek yıldırma(dan) kim okuyecek her gün ölümündän ileri üç gün olacek haberlenmiş ölümünä Ayöz nişanı o saatta bitki vakıtta. Amin.



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